MAY
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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Express to Danger
by MIGNON G. EBERHART

The Indiscretion of Letty Shaw
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Behind the Star
by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

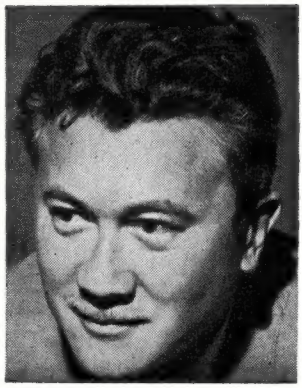
The Phonograph Murder
by HELEN REILLY

The Wicked Cousin
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

PREMIERE OF MURDER
A BRAND-NEW STORY by FREDRIC BROWN

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



When I consider (as I seldom do) the flatulent judgment of the eggheads who affect to look down their long noses at the type of fiction which this magazine is dedicated to merchandizing, I am usually tempted to retort that the main difference between the so-called "better" literature and ours is that the former takes a normal and believable situation and problem and wrings it out to a remorselessly dull and predictable conclusion, whereas our writers would never sell us a line if they couldn't start with the same material and rapidly lead through a few novel and original twists to something fairly electrifyingly unexpected.

To get my own contribution out of the way first and fast this time, THE WICKED COUSIN begins with a nice girl getting the short end of an ungrateful legacy. But what the Saint does about it is highly unconventional, and I'll bet that no one can guess the pay-off.

Helen Reilly's THE PHONOGRAPH MURDER starts with nothing more unique than a man who just can't stand his wife any longer. But his ingenious device for terminating the relationship makes the conventional divorce look very dull and unimaginative, and gives a stiff cerebral work-out to our old friend Inspector McKee.

Not being statistically minded and having only ten fingers and ten toes, I would hate to have the count the number of stories that have been written about the innocent man whom the police are trying to hang. But in THE INDISCRETION OF LETTY SHAW, that old maestro E. Phillips Oppenheim, with the help of his famous character Peter Ruff, shows that there is more than one way out of this kind of jam.

Plenty of girls ride Chicago's El after dark. But not all of them, perhaps fortunately, are jostled by mysterious passengers, prodded with guns through bulging coat pockets, and find themselves pitchforked out of the confusion of a sudden grinding halt into a house of mystery with a corpse on the living-room floor. But not all these girls, of course, are Mignon G. Eberhart's unusual skirted sleuth Susan Dare. EXPRESS TO DANGER is one of her greatest adventures.

PREMIERE OF MURDER probably has the most off-beat ingredients on our menu this month, with a New Mexico tank town, its barrooms, a carnival, a local theater, and a bunch of wet-back gangsters to offset the perhaps inevitable luscious blonde. The bullets fly thick and fast from page 1 onwards, as do the characteristic cracks of Fredric Brown's trenchant wit, all the way to a surprise climax. This is a brand-new novelet by one of our very best new writers.

Chow down, kids. Come and get it.

Leslie Charteris

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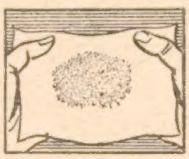
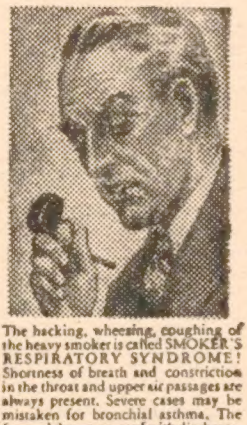


1. Light pipe, cigarette or cigar and take a big puff. Get out your handkerchief or a piece of Kleenex and hold tightly in front of your lips. Filter tip cigarettes make no difference whatsoever.
2. Don't inhale, but blow a puff of tobacco smoke right through cloth or tissue—then look! You see tars, nicotine, and impurities that impair your health!
3. Repeat 2 but this time inhale. See how all the tars and poisons have stayed in your lungs! If you could see the insides of your lungs, you'd quit smoking!

After making this test, you'll see with your own eyes the impurities in a single puff of tobacco smoke, most of which goes into your lungs. Imagine what continuous smoking — pack after pack — year after year — does to your body. Stop the life-shortening smoking habit this very week — before it's too late!



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the wicked cousin

by . . . Leslie Charteris

A pretty girl, a mysterious will and the strangest love letters ever penned. Small wonder Simon's universe reeled — just a little!

THERE WAS a girl called Jacqueline Laine whom Simon Templar remembered suddenly, as one does sometimes remember people, with a sense of startling familiarity and a kind of guilty amazement that he should have allowed her to slip out of his mind for so long.

This was on one of the rare occasions when he was not thinking about business. Simon Templar's business had an unfortunate habit of falling into categories which gave many people good reason to wonder what right he had to the nickname of the Saint by which he was far more widely known than he was by his baptismal titles; but "business" was the polite name he gave it.

It is true that these buccaneering raids of his which had earned him the sub-title of "The Robin Hood of Modern Crime" were invariably undertaken against the property, and occasionally the persons, of citizens who by no stretch of imagination could have been called desirable; but the Law took no official cognizance of such small details. The Law, in the Saint's opinion, was a

AMIDST ENGLISH LANES IN A BRIGHT, EARLY SAGA THE SAINT TRAPS A FOX WITH THE APLOMB THAT MADE HIM FAMOUS

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From THE HAPPY HIGHWAYMAN. Published by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

stodgy and elephantine institution which was chiefly justified in its existence by the pleasantly musical explosive noises which it made when he broke it.

He picked up the telephone. "Hullo, Jacqueline," he said when she answered. "Do you know who this is?"

"I know," she said. "It's Julius Caesar."

"You have a marvellous memory. Do you still eat?"

"Whenever I'm thirsty. Do you?"

"I nibble a crumb now and then. Come out with me tonight and see if we can still take it."

"Simon, I'd love to; but I'm in the most frantic muddle—"

"So is the rest of the world, darling. But it's two years since I've seen you, and that's about seven hundred and thirty days too long. Don't you realize that I've been all the way around the world, surviving all manner of perils and slaying large numbers of ferocious dragons, just to get back in time to take you out to dinner tonight?"

"I know, but—Oh, well. It would be so thrilling to see you. Come around about seven, and I'll try to get a bit straightened out before then."

"I'll be there," said the Saint.

Half an hour later he drove his great cream and red car westwards out of London. Somewhere beyond Bagshot he turned off to the right and began to wander through narrow winding lanes in which the feverish main-road traffic which he had just left was very quickly forgotten. He found his way with the certainty of vivid remembrance; and he was fully ten minutes early when he pulled the car in to the roadside before the gate of Jacqueline Laine's house.

He climbed out and started towards the gate, lighting a cigarette as he went; and as he approached it he perceived that somebody else was approaching the same gate from the opposite side. Changing his course a little to the left so that the departing guest would have room to pass him, the Saint observed that he was a small and elderly gent arrayed in clothes so shapeless and ill-fitting that they gave his figure a comical air of having been loosely and inaccurately strung together from a selection of stuffed bags of cloth. He wore a discolored Panama hat of weird and wonderful architecture, and carried an incongruous green umbrella, furled, but still flapping in a bedraggled and forlorn sort of way, under his left arm; his face was rubicund and bulbous like his body, looking as if it had been carelessly slapped together out of a few odd lumps of pink modeling clay.

As Simon moved to the left, the elderly gent duplicated the maneuver. Simon turned his feet and swerved politely to the right.

The elderly gent did exactly the same, as if he were Simon's own reflection in a distorting mirror. Simon stopped altogether, and decided to economize energy by letting the elderly gent make the next move in the ballet.

Whereupon he discovered that the game of undignified dodging in which he had just prepared to surrender his part was caused by some dimly discernible ambition of the elderly gent's to hold converse with him. Standing in front of him and blinking short-sightedly upwards from his lower altitude to the Saint's six foot two, with his mouth hanging vacantly open like an inverted U and three long yellow teeth hanging down like stalactites from the top, the elderly gent tapped him on the chest and said, very earnestly and distinctly: "Hig fwmgn glugl phnihkln hgrm skhlglgl?"

"I beg your pardon?" said the Saint vaguely.

"Hig fwmgn," repeated the elderly gent, "glugl phnihkln hgrm skhlglgl?"

Simon considered the point. "If you ask me," he replied at length, "I should say sixteen."

The elderly gent's knobbly face seemed to take on a brighter shade of pink. He clutched the lapels of the Saint's coat, shaking him slightly in a positive passion of anguish.

"Flogh ghoglusk," he pleaded, "klngnt hu ughlgstghnd?"

Simon shook his head. "No," he said judiciously, "you're thinking of weevils."

The little man bounced about like a rubber doll. His eyes squinted with a kind of frantic despair.

"Ogmighogho," he almost screamed, "klngt hu ughglstghnd? Ik ghln ngmnpp sktlghko! Klugt hu hgr? *Ik wgnt hlg phnihkln hgrm skhlglgl!*"

The Saint sighed. He was by nature a kindly man to those whom the gods had afflicted, but time was passing and he was thinking of Jacqueline Laine.

"I'm afraid not, dear old bird," he murmured regretfully. "There used to be one, but it died. Sorry, I'm sure."

He patted the elderly gent apologetically upon the shoulder, steered his way around him, and passed on out of earshot of the frenzied sputtering noises that continued to honk despairingly through the dusk behind him. Two minutes later he was with Jacqueline.

Jacqueline Laine was twenty-three; she was tall and slender; she had gray eyes that twinkled and a demoralizing mouth. Both of these temptations were in play as she came towards him; but he was still slightly shaken by his recent encounter.

"Have you got any more village idiots hidden around?" he asked warily, as he took her hands; and she was puzzled.

"We used to have several, but they've all gone into Parliament. Did you want one to take home?"

"My God, no," said the Saint fervently. "The one I met at the gate was bad enough. Is he your latest boy friend?"

Her brow cleared. "Oh, you mean the old boy with the cleft palate? Isn't he marvellous? I think he's got a screw loose or something. He's been hanging around all day—he keeps ringing the bell and bleating at me. I'd just sent him away for the third time. Did he try to talk to you?"

"He did sort of wag his adenoids at me," Simon admitted, "but I don't think we actually got on to common ground. I felt quite jealous of him for a bit, until I realized that he couldn't possibly kiss you nearly as well as I can, with that set of teeth."

He proceeded to demonstrate this.

"I'm still in a hopeless muddle," she said presently. "But I'll be ready in five minutes. You can be fixing a cocktail while I make myself presentable."

In the living-room there was an open trunk in one corner and a half-filled packing case in the middle of the floor. There were scattered heaps of paper around it, and a few partially wrapped and unidentifiable objects on the table. The room had that curiously naked and inhospitable look which a room has when it has been stripped of all those intimately personal odds and ends of junk which make it a home, and only the bare furniture is left.

The Saint raised his eyebrows. "Hullo," he said. "Are you moving?"

"Sort of," she shrugged. "Moving out, anyway."

"Where to?"

"I don't know."

He realized then that there should have been someone else there, in that room.

"Isn't your grandmother here any more?"

"She died four weeks ago."

"I'm sorry."

"She was a good soul. But she was terribly old. Do you know she was just ninety-seven?" She held his hand for a moment. "I'll tell you all about it when I come down. Do you remember where to find the bottles?"

"Templars and elephants never forget."

He blended gin, curacao, vermouth and bitters skilfully and with the zeal of an artist, while he waited for her, remembering the old lady whom he had seen so often in that room. Also he remembered the affectionate service Jacqueline had always lavished on her, cheerfully limiting her own enjoyment of life to meet the demands of an unconscious tyrant who would allow no one else to look after her, and wondered if there was any

realistic reason to regret the ending of such a long life. She had, he knew, looked after Jacqueline herself in her time, and had brought her up as her own child since she was left an orphan at the age of three; but life must always belong to the young . . . He thought that for Jacqueline it must be a supreme escape. But he knew that she would never say so.

She came down punctually in the five minutes which she had promised. She had changed her dress and put a comb through her hair, and with that seemed to have achieved more than any other woman could have shown for an hour's fiddling in front of a mirror.

"You should have been in pictures," said the Saint; and he meant it.

"Maybe I shall," she said. "I'll have to do something to earn a living now."

"Is it as bad as that?"

She nodded. "But I can't complain. I never had to work for anything before. Why shouldn't I start? Other people have to."

"Is that why you're moving out?"

"The house isn't mine."

"But didn't the old girl leave you anything?"

"She left me some letters."

The Saint almost spilt his drink. She sat down heavily on the edge of the table.

"She left you some *letters?* After you'd practically been a slave to her since you got out of school? What did she do with the rest of her property—leave it to a home for stray cats?"

"No, she left it to Harry."

"Who?"

"Her grandson."

"I didn't know you had any brothers."

I haven't. Harry Westler is my cousin. He's—well, as a matter of fact he's a sort of black sheep. He's a gambler, and he was in prison for forging a check. Nobody else in the family would have anything to do with him, and if you believe what they used to say about him they were probably quite right; but Granny always had a soft spot for him. She never believed he could do anything wrong—he was just a mischievous boy to her. Well, you know how old she was . . .

"And she left everything to him?"

"Practically everything. I'll show you."

She went to a drawer of the writing table and brought him a typewritten sheet. He saw that it was a copy of a will, and turned to the details of the bequests.

To my dear grand-daughter Jacqueline Laine, who has taken care of me so thoughtfully and unselfishly for four years, One Hundred Pounds and my letters from Sidney Farlance, knowing that she will find them of more

value than anything else I could leave her.

To my cook, Eliza Jefferson, and my chauffeur, Albert Gordon, One Hundred Pounds each, for their loyal service.

The remainder of my estate, after these deductions, including my house and other personal belongings, to my dear grandson Harry Westler, hoping that it will help him to make the success of life of which I have always believed him capable.

Simon folded the sheet and dropped it on the table from his finger-tips as if it were infected.

"Suffering Judas," he said helplessly. "After all you did for her—to pension you off on the same scale as the cook and the chauffeur! And what about Harry—doesn't he propose to do anything about it?"

"Why should he? The will's perfectly clear."

"Why shouldn't he? Just because the old crow went off her trolley in the last few days of senile decay is no reason why he shouldn't do something to put it right. There must have been enough for both of you."

"Not so much. They found that Granny had been living on her capital for years. There was only about four thousand pounds —and the house."

"What of it? He could spare half."

Jacqueline smiled—a rather tired little smile.

"You haven't met Harry. He's —difficult . . . He's been here, of course. The agents already have his instructions to sell the house and the furniture. He gave me a week to get out, and the week is up the day after tomorrow. I couldn't possibly ask him for anything."

Simon lighted a cigarette as if it tasted of bad eggs, and scowled malevolently about the room.

"The skunk! And so you get chucked out in to the wide world with nothing but a hundred quid."

"And the letters," she added ruefully.

"What the hell are these letters?"

"They're love letters," she said; and the Saint looked as if he would explode.

"Love letters?" he repeated in an awful voice.

"Yes. Granny had a great romance when she was a girl. Her parents wouldn't let her get any further with it, because the boy hadn't any money and his family wasn't good enough. He went abroad with one of those heroic young ideas of making a fortune in South America and coming back in a gold-plated carriage to claim her. He died of fever somewhere in Brazil very soon after, but he wrote her three letters—two from British Guiana and one from Colombia.

"Oh, I know them by heart—I used to have to read them

aloud to Granny almost every night, after her eyes got too bad for her to be able to read them herself. They're just the ordinary simple sort of thing that you'd expect in the circumstances but to Granny they were the most precious thing she had. I suppose she had some funny old idea in her head that they'd be just as precious to me."

"She must have been screwy," said the Saint.

Jacqueline came up and put a hand over his mouth. "She was very good to me when I was a kid," she said.

"I know, but—" Simon flung up his arms hopelessly. And then, almost reluctantly, he began to laugh. "But it does mean that I've just come back in time. And we'll have so much fun tonight that you won't even think about it for a minute. We'll just be old friends on a lark."

Probably he made good his boast, for Simon Templar brought to the solemn business of enjoying himself the same gay zest and inspired impetuosity which he brought to his battles with the technicalities of the Law. But if he followed her into the living-room of the house again much later, for a night cap, the desolate scene of interrupted packing, and the copy of the will still lying on the table where he had put it down, brought the thoughts with which he had been subconsciously playing throughout the evening back into the forefront of his mind.

"Are you going to let Harry get away with it?" he asked her, with a sudden characteristic directness.

The girl shrugged. "What else can I do?"

"I have an idea," said the Saint; and his blue eyes danced with an unholy delight which she had never seen in them before . . .

Mr. Westler was not a man whose contacts with the Law had conspired to make him particularly happy about any of its workings; and therefore when he saw that the card which was brought to him in his hotel bore in its bottom left hand corner the name of a firm with the word "Solicitors" underneath it, he suffered an immediate hollow twinge in the base of his stomach for which he could scarcely be blamed. A moment's reflection, however, reminded him that another card with a similar inscription had recently been the forerunner of an extremely welcome windfall, and with this reassuring thought he told the page boy to bring the visitor into his presence.

Mr. Tombs, of Tombs, Tombs and Tombs, as the card introduced him, was a tall lean man with neatly brushed white hair, bushy white eyebrows, a pair of gold-rimmed and drooping

pince-nez on the end of a broad black ribbon, and an engagingly avuncular manner which rapidly completed the task of restoring Harry Westler's momentarily shaken confidence. He came to the point with professional efficiency combined with professional pomposity.

"I have come to see you in connection with the estate of the —ah—late Mrs. Laine. I understand that you are her heir."

"That's right," said Mr. Westler.

He was a dark, flashily dressed man with small greedy eyes and a face rather reminiscent of that of a sick horse.

"Splendid." The lawyer placed his finger-tips on his knees and leaned forward, peering benevolently over the rims of his glasses. "Now I for my part am representing the Sesame Mining Development Corporation."

He said this more or less as if he were announcing himself as the personal herald of Jehovah, but Mr. Westler's mind ran in practical channels.

"Did my grandmother have shares in the company?" he asked quickly.

"Ah—ah—no. That is—ah—no. Not exactly. But I understand that she was in possession of a letter or document which my clients regard as extremely valuable."

"A letter?"

"Exactly. But perhaps I had better give you an outline of the situation. Your grandmother was, in her youth, greatly—ah—enamored of a certain Sidney Farlance. Perhaps at some time or other you have heard her speak of him."

"Yes."

"For various reasons her parents refused to give their consent to the alliance; but the young people for their part refused to take no for an answer, and Farlance went abroad with the intention of making his fortune in foreign parts and returning in due course to claim his bride. In this ambition he was unhappily frustrated by his—ah—premature decease in Brazil. But it appears that during his travels in British Guiana he did become the owner of a mining concession in a certain inaccessible area of territory. British Guiana, as you are doubtless aware," continued Mr. Tombs in his dry pedagogic voice, "is traditionally reputed to be the source of the legend of El Dorado, the Gilded King, who was said to cover himself with pure gold and to wash it from him in the waters of a sacred lake called Manoa—"

"Never mind all that baloney," said Harry Westler, who was not interested in history or mythology. "Tell me about his concession."

Mr. Tombs pressed his lips with a pained expression, but he went on.

"At the time it did not appear that gold could be profitably obtained from this district, and the claim was abandoned and forgotten. Modern engineering methods, however, have recently revealed deposits of almost fabulous value in the district, and my clients have obtained a concession to work it over a very large area of ground. Subsequent investigations into their title, meanwhile, have brought out the existence of this small—uh—prior concession granted to Sidney Farlance, which is situated almost in the center of my clients' territory and in a position which —ah—exploratory drillings have shown to be one of the richest areas in the district."

Mr. Westler digested the information; and in place of the first sinking vacuum which had afflicted his stomach when he saw the word "solicitor" on his visitor's card, a sudden and ecstatic awe localized itself in the same place and began to cramp his lungs as if he had accidentally swallowed a rubber balloon with his breakfast and it was being rapidly inflated by some supernatural agency.

"You mean my grandmother owned this concession?"

"That is what—ah—my clients are endeavoring to discover. Farlance himself, of course, left no heirs, and we have been unable to trace any surviving members of his family. In the course of inquiries, however, we did learn of his—ah—romantic interest in your grandmother, and we have every reason to believe that in the circumstances he would naturally have made her the beneficiary of any such asset, however problematical its value may have seemed at the time."

"And you want to buy it out —is that it?"

"Ah—yes. That is—ah—provided that our deductions are correct and the title can be established. I may say that my clients would be prepared to pay very liberally—"

"They'd have to," said Mr. Westler briskly. "How much are they good for?"

The lawyer raised his hands deprecatingly.

"You need have no alarm, my dear Mr. Westler. The acutal figure, would, of course, be a matter for negotiation, but it would doubtless run close to a million pounds. But first of all, you understand we must trace the actual concession papers which will be sufficient to establish your right to negotiate. Now it seems that in view of the relationship between Farlance and your grandmother, she would probably have treasured his letters as most women do, even though she later married someone else, particularly if there was a document of that sort among them. People don't usually throw things like that away. In that

case you will doubtless have inherited these letters along with her other personal property. Possibly you have not yet had an occasion to peruse them, but if you would do so as soon as possible—"

One of Harry Westler's few Napoleonic qualities was a remarkable capacity for quick and constructive thinking.

"Certainly I have the letters," he said, "but I haven't gone through them yet. My lawyer has them at present, and he's in Edinburgh today. He'll be back tomorrow morning, and I'll get hold of them at once. Come and see me again tomorrow afternoon and I expect I'll have some news for you."

"Tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Westler? Certainly. I think that will be convenient. Ah—certainly." The lawyer stood up, took off his pince-nez, polished them, and revolved them like a windmill on the end of their ribbon. "This has indeed been a most happy meeting, my dear sir. And may I say that I hope that tomorrow afternoon it will be even happier?"

"You can go on saying that right up till the time we start talking prices," said Harry.

The door had scarcely closed behind Mr. Tombs when Mr. Westler was on the telephone to his cousin. He suppressed a sigh of relief when he heard her voice, and announced as casually as he could his intention of coming down to see her.

"I think we ought to have another talk—I was terribly upset by the shock of Granny's death when I saw you the other day, and I'm afraid I wasn't quite myself, but I'll make all the apologies you like when I get there," he said in an unfamiliarly gentle voice which cost him a great effort to achieve, and was grabbing his hat before the telephone was properly back on its bracket.

He made a call at the bank on his way, and sat in the hired car which carried him out into the country as if its cushions had been upholstered with hot spikes. The exact words of that portion of the Will which referred to the letters drummed through his memory with a staggering significance. *"My letters from Sidney Farlance, knowing that she will find them of more value than anything else I could leave her."* The visit of Mr. Tombs had made him understand them perfectly. His grandmother had known what was in them; but did Jacqueline know? His heart almost stopped beating with anxiety.

As he leapt out of the car and dashed towards the house he cannoned into a small and weirdly apparelled elderly gent who was apparently emerging from the gate at the same time. Mr. Westler checked himself involuntar-

ily; and the elderly gent, sent flying by the impact, bounced off a gatepost and tottered back at him. He clutched Harry by the sleeve and peered up at him pathetically.

"Glhwf hngwglgl," he said pleadingly, "kngnduk glu bwtl-hjp mnyihgli?"

"Oh, go choke yourself," snarled Mr. Westler impatiently.

He pushed the little man roughly aside and went on.

Jacqueline opened the door to him, and Mr. Westler steeled himself to kiss her on the forehead with cousinly affection.

"I was an awful swine the other day, Jackie. I don't know what could have been the matter with me. I've always been terribly selfish," he said with an effort, "and at the time I didn't really see how badly Granny had treated you. She didn't leave you anything except those letters, did she?"

"She left me a hundred pounds," said Jacqueline calmly.

"A hundred pounds!" said Harry indignantly. "After you'd given up everything else to take care of her. And she left me more than four thousand pounds and the house and everything else in it. It's—disgusting! But I don't have to take advantage of it, do I? I've been thinking a lot about it lately—"

Jacqueline lighted a cigarette and regarded him stonily. "Thanks," she said briefly. "But I haven't asked you for any charity."

"It isn't charity," protested Mr. Westler virtuously. "It's just a matter of doing the decent thing. The lawyers have done their share—handed everything over to me and seen that the will was carried out. Now we can start again. We could pool everything again and divide it the way we think it ought to be divided."

"As far as I'm concerned, that's been done already."

"But I'm not happy about it. I've got all the money, and you know what I'm like. I'll probably gamble it all away in a few months."

"That's your affair."

"Oh, don't be like that, Jackie. I've apologized, haven't I? Besides, what Granny left you is worth a lot more than money. I mean those letters of hers. I'd willingly give up a thousand pounds of my share if I could have had those. They're the one thing of the old lady's which really mean a great deal to me."

"You're becoming very sentimental all of a sudden, aren't you?" asked the girl curiously.

"Maybe I am. I suppose you can't really believe that a rotter like me could feel that way about anything, but Granny was the only person in the world who ever really believed any good of me and liked me in spite of everything. If I gave you a thousand pounds for those letters, it

wouldn't be charity—I'd be paying less than I think they're worth. Let's put it that way if you'd rather, Jackie. An ordinary business deal. If I had them," said Mr. Westler, with something like a sob in his voice, "they'd always be a reminder to me of the old lady and how good she was. They might help me to go straight—"

His emotion was so touching that even Jacqueline's cynical incredulity lost some of its assurance. Harry Westler was playing his part with every technical trick that he knew, and he had a mastery of these emotional devices which victims far more hard-boiled than Jacqueline had experienced to their cost.

"I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself, and I want to put things right in any way I can. Don't make me feel any worse than I do already Look here, I'll give you two thousand pounds for the letters and I won't regret a penny of it. You won't regret it either, will you, if they help me to keep out of trouble in future?"

Jacqueline smiled in spite of herself. It was not in her nature to bear malice, and it was very hard for her to resist an appeal that was made in those terms. Also, with the practical side of her mind, she was honest enough to realize that her grandmother's letters had no sentimental value for her whatever, and that two thousand pounds was a sum of money which she could not afford to refuse unless her pride was compelled to forbid it; her night out with the Saint had helped her to forget her problems for the moment, but she had awakened that morning with a very sober realization of the position in which she was going to find herself within the next forty-eight hours.

"If you put it like that I can't very well refuse, can I?" she said, and Harry jumped up and clasped her fervently by the hand.

"You'll really do it, Jackie? You don't know how much I appreciate it."

She disengaged herself quietly. "It doesn't do me any harm," she told him truthfully. "Would you like to have the letters now?"

"If they're anywhere handy. I brought some money along with me, so we can fix it all up right away."

She went upstairs and fetched the letters from the dressing table in her grandmother's room. Mr. Westler took them and tore off the faded ribbon with which they were tied together with slightly trembling fingers which she attributed to an unexpected depth of emotion. One by one he took them out of their envelopes and read rapidly through them. The last sheet of the third letter was a different kind of paper from the rest. The paper was discolored and cracked in

the folds, and the ink had the rusty brown hue of great age; but he saw the heavy official seal in one corner and strained his eyes to decipher the stiff old-fashioned script.

We, Philip Edmond Wodehouse, Commander of the Most Noble Order of the Bath, Governor in the name of Her Brittannic Majesty of the Colony of British Guiana, by virtue of the powers conferred upon us by Her Majesty's Privy Council, do hereby proclaim and declare to all whom it may concern that we have this day granted to Sidney Farlance, a subject of Her Majesty the Queen, and to his heirs and assigns being determined by the possession of this authority, the sole right to prospect and mine for minerals of any kind whatsoever in the territory indicated and described in the sketch map at the foot of this authority, for the term of nine hundred and ninety-nine years from the date of these presents.

Given under our hand and seal this third day of January Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-six.

At the bottom of the sheet, below the map and description, was scrawled in a different hand: *"This is all for you. S. F."*

Harry Westler stuffed the letters into his pocket and took out his wallet. His heart was beating in a delirious rhythm of ecstasy and sending the blood roaring through his ears like the crashing crescendo of a symphony. The Gates of Paradise seemed to have opened up and deluged him with all their reservoirs of bliss. The whole world was his sweetheart. If the elderly gent whose strange nasal gargling he had dismissed so discourteously a short time ago had cannoned into him again at that moment, it is almost certain that Mr. Westler would not have told him to go choke himself. He would probably have kissed him on both cheeks and given him a shilling.

For the first time in his life, Harry Westler counted out twenty hundred-pound notes as cheerfully as he would have counted them in.

"There you are, Jackie. And I'm not foolish—it takes a load off my mind. If you think of anything else I can do for you, just let me know."

"I think you've done more than anyone could have asked," she said generously. "Won't you stay and have a drink?"

Mr. Westler declined the offer firmly. He had no moral prejudice against drinking, and in fact he wanted a drink very badly, but more particularly he wanted to have it in a place where he would not have to place any more restraint on the shouting rhapsodies that were seething through his system like bubbles through champagne.

Some two hours later, when Simon Templar drifted into the house, he found Jacqueline still looking slightly dazed. She flung her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Simon!" she gasped. "You must be a mascot or something. You'll never guess what's happened."

"I'll tell you exactly what's happened," said the Saint calmly. "Cousin Harry has been here, told you that he'd rather have dear old Granny's love letters than all the money in the world, and paid you the hell of a good price for them. At least I hope he paid you the hell of a good price."

Jacqueline gaped at him weakly. "He paid me two thousand pounds. But how on earth did you know? Why did he do it?"

"He did it because a lawyer called on him this morning and told him that Sidney Farlance had collared an absolutely priceless mining concession when he was in British Guiana, and that there was probably something about it in the letters which would be worth a million to whoever had them to prove his claim."

She looked at him aghast. "A mining concession? I don't remember anything about it—"

"You wouldn't," said the Saint kindly. "It wasn't there until I slipped it in when I got you to show me the letters at breakfast time this morning. I sat up for the other half of the night faking the best imitation I could of what I thought a concession ought to look like, and apparently it was good enough for Harry. Of course I was the lawyer who told him all about it, and I think I fed him the oil pretty smoothly, so perhaps there was some excuse for him. I take it that he was quite excited about it—I see he didn't even bother to take the envelopes—"

Jacqueline opened her mouth again, but what she was going to say with it remained a permanently unsolved question, for at that moment the unnecessarily vigorous ringing of a bell stopped her short. The Saint cocked his ears speculatively at the sound, and a rather pleased and seraphic smiled worked itself into his face.

"I expect this is Harry coming back," he said. "He wasn't supposed to see me again until tomorrow, but I suppose he couldn't wait. He's probably tried to ring up at the address I had printed on my card, and discovered that there ain't no such lawyers as I was supposed to represent. It will be rather interesting to hear what he has to say."

For once, however, Simon's guess was wrong. Instead of the indignant equine features of Harry Westler, he confronted the pink imploring features of

the small and shapeless elderly gent with whom he had danced prettily around the gateposts the day before. The little man's face lighted up, and he bounced over the doorstep and seized the Saint joyfully by both lapels of his coat.

"Mnyng hlfwgl!" he crowed triumphantly. "Ahkgap glglgl hndiuphwmp!"

Simon recoiled slightly. "Yes. I know," he said soothingly. "But it's five o'clock on Fridays. Two bob every other yard."

"Ogh hmbals!" said the little man.

He let go the Saint's coat, ducked under his arms, and scuttled on into the living-room.

"Hey!" said the Saint feebly. "May I explain, sir?"

Another voice spoke from the doorway, and Simon perceived that the little man had not come alone. Someone else had taken his place on the threshold—a thin and mournful-looking individual whom the Saint somewhat pardonably took to be the little man's keeper.

"Are you looking after that?" he inquired resignedly. "And why don't you keep it on a lead?"

The mournful-looking individual shook his head.

"That is Mr. Horatio Ive, sir. He is a very rich man, but he suffers from an unfortunate impediment in his speech. Very few people can understand him. I go about with him as his interpreter, but I have been in bed for the last three days with a chill—"

A shrill war-whoop from the other room interrupted the explanation.

"We'd better go and see how he's getting on," said the Saint.

"Mr. Ive is very impulsive, sir," went on the sad-looking interpreter. "He was most anxious to see somebody here, and even though I was unable to accompany him he has called here several times alone. I understand that he found it impossible to make himself understood. He practically dragged me out of bed to come with him now."

"What's he so excited about?" asked the Saint, as they walked towards the living-room.

"He's interested in some letters, sir, belonging to the late Mrs. Laine. She happened to show them to him when they met once several years ago, and he wanted to buy them. She refused to sell them for sentimental reasons, but as soon as he read of her death he decided to approach her heirs."

"Are you talking about her love letters from a bird called Sidney Farlance?" Simon asked hollowly.

"Yes, sir. The gentleman who worked in British Guiana. Mr. Ive is prepared to pay something like ten thousand pounds—is anything the matter, sir?"

Simon Templar swallowed.

"Oh, nothing," he said faintly. "Nothing at all."

They entered the living-room to interrupt a scene of considerable excitement. Backing towards the wall, with a blank expression of alarm widening her eyes, Jacqueline Laine was staring dumbly at the small elderly gent, who was capering about in front of her like a frenzied Redskin, spluttering yard after yard of his incomprehensible adenoidal honks interspersed with wild piercing squeaks apparently expressive of intolerable joy. In each hand he held an envelope aloft like a banner.

As his interpreter came in, he turned and rushed towards him, loosing a fresh stream of noises like those of a hysterical duck.

"Mr. Ive is saying, sir," explained the interpreter, raising his voice harmoniously above the din, "that each of those envelopes bears a perfect example of the British Guiana one-cent magenta stamp of 1856, of which only one specimen was previously believed to exist. Mr. Ive is an ardent philatelist, sir, and these envelopes—"

Simon Templar blinked hazily at the small crudely printed stamp in the corner of the envelope which the little man was waving under his nose.

"You mean," he said cautiously, "that Mr. Ive is really only interested in the envelopes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not the letters themselves?"

"Not the letters."

"And he's been flapping around the house all this time trying to tell somebody about it?"

"Yes, sir."

Simon Templar drew a deep breath. The foundations of the world were spinning giddily around his ears, but his natural resilience was inconquerable. He took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"In that case," he said contentedly, "I'm sure we can do business. What do you say, Jacqueline?"

Jacqueline clutched his arm and nodded breathlessly.

"Hlgagtsk sweghlemlgh," beamed Mr. Ive.

When Marco Polo traveled to Far Cathay mystery walked at his side and romance and high adventure kept breathless pace with him. But an even more daring traveller is the Saint, for the medieval mind could not conceive of the fierce tempests of danger, intrigue and excitement which modern crime can brew. And we're romantically convinced that only in Cuba, the land of rumba and fiesta and sultry-eyed caballeros could our beloved rogue have found himself outwitting a conspiracy as rapier-wicked as that which centered about THE ROMANTIC MATRON, *which Leslie Charteris has spread out for your delight in our very next* SAINT.

premiere of murder

by . . . Fredric Brown

It was a quiet little New Mexico town with its plaza bathed in sunlight. But the shot that woke Delaney ushered in a death waltz.

THE FIRST SHOT woke Delaney. Not from sound sleep; he'd merely dozed off for a minute or two, through boredom, since the Luscious Lush had disappeared.

She was back now, he saw, and it was she who was doing the shooting. She had the most beautiful legs he had ever seen. The most beautiful everything else, for that matter; including, incidentally, a beautiful jag. But she held her liquor well.

She held the gun well, too, and kept pulling the trigger. It was only a twenty-two, but a heavy one with a long barrel, a target gun. She was pumping bullets into the chest of a tall, thin man with an evil, dissipated-looking face who stood swaying only a few feet from her.

The noise hurt Delaney's ears so he closed his eyes again. As town marshal, he didn't like to see people shot. And he had always hated the sound of gunfire, ever since he'd been a rookie cop in Brooklyn ten years before.

Fredric Brown's most famous novel is perhaps THE FABULOUS CLIP JOINT. *But he has stirred crime's dark waters so fabulously in a dozen chilling directions that some readers most admire his brilliant, lethal dispatching of midgets and even grandmothers. Anyway, he's to our way of thinking just about America's top "always original, always exciting" concocter of high-voltage suspense yarns. And here—miracles of miracles—is a brand new Brown novelette, as gripping as the tale which won him a Mystery Writers' Edgar.*

The shots kept coming until there'd been six of them and he knew it was all right to open his eyes again. But before he did, the Luscious Lush screamed.

Something about the sound of that scream jerked Delaney's eyes open faster than he'd ever opened them before.

The tall, thin man was still swaying, with a dazed, blank look on his face. He didn't even look evil any more. Suddenly he looked dead, dead on his feet. Bright red was staining the front of his dress shirt.

He fell and not as an actor who expects to get up again ever falls. His head hit the boards of the little stage with a thunk that probably cracked his skull.

Beside Delaney, Lew Godey gasped and grabbed Delaney's arm. He said, "My God, Delaney! *Those weren't blanks.*"

Delaney had figured that out already, all by himself, despite fuzziness in his head from all the drinks he'd had.

He stood up, slowly . . .

It had started, you might say, two hours before. At ten o'clock, to be exact, in the bar of La Fonda de Tesqua. With Delaney sitting in a booth and making wet circles on the table before him with a glass that tinkled pleasantly as he moved it. The bar had been dimly lit. So had Delaney.

From across the table, Lew Godey looked at him with tolerant amusement through thick shell-rimmed glasses. He said, "I'll bet you change your mind, Delaney."

Delaney said, "Nuts."

He turned his head and looked out the window at the open square of the Plaza, bathed in yellow New Mexican moonlight. Through an open space between trees he could see the bright marquee of the Tesqua Theater and the letters of light that read: "PREMIERE AT MIDNIGHT: CARNIVAL OF DEATH."

Lew Godey said, "The biggest event that ever happened in this Godforsaken little New Mexican town of yours—Godforsaken except in the tourist season, and you won't go."

Delaney chuckled. He said, "The biggest thing that ever happens in this town happens every day, Lew. The sun comes up and shines. People come from halfway around the world for it. And the mountains. You used to love those mountains when you lived here. And now you say that the premiere of a B-grade horror picture called *Carnival of Death*—It *is* a B-picture, isn't it?"

"Well, yes. But—"

"But just because you wrote it and because it happens to be set in Tesqua, I should sit through it on a night like this?"

"Sure you should. Civic duty, if nothing more. You're town marshal."

"Nuts," said Delaney. He looked toward the bar, caught

Sam's eye, and lifted two fingers. Sam started making two more drinks.

Lew Godey said, "Delaney, I'd really like you to see the picture. Sure it's a B, but I *wrote* it; it's my baby. And it's a horror picture, but it's well plotted. The only reason it's not an A is the budget we had to make it on, and within that budget we did a swell job. And Toni Lavalle— You haven't met her yet, have you?"

Delaney shook his head.

"She's out of this world, Delaney. And she can almost act."

"Then why's she in B-pictures?"

Godey frowned. "If you must know, she drinks too much. Outside of that, I think she could go places. But the last few months out in Hollywood they got to calling her the Luscious Lush. And these days a starlet can't do that and get to be a big star. Even with—" He made a two-handed gesture that finished the sentence better than words could have.

The drinks came and Delaney took half of his at a draught. He said, "You're using unfair tactics now, but I'm almost persuaded."

"Delaney, if you keep on drinking at the rate you have since we've been together this evening— You had a start when we met, didn't you?"

"A fair start, yes."

"Then you won't see much of the picture anyway."

Delaney laughed. "This *is* an inducement. By the way, whose silly idea was it to have the premiere at midnight?"

"Bill Wiley thought it up. The director. Not so silly, though; it's a good publicity angle on a horror picture. And it makes us sure of a full house, with the show being free to those who see the last show of the regular program. All they have to do is keep their seats and see it for free. And others will come specially for it."

"What makes you think anybody will come specially for it?"

"Don't be silly, Delaney. With the stars of the picture appearing *personally?* Even enacting a scene or two from the picture? They'll be fighting to get in."

Delaney grunted. "Good. Then maybe there won't be seats for us."

"Got a row roped off for special guests. You can't weasel out of it that way."

"Hey, Sam," Delaney said. "Two more drinks."

"Just one," Godey told the bartender. To Delaney: "I want to be able to walk across the Plaza. What ever happened to your painting, Delaney? You were painting like mad when I knew you here eight years ago. Now you're the town marshal. What happened?"

"Found out I couldn't paint.

Not well enough. But by that time I was in love with Tesqua and the mountains and the sun. And I'd been a cop once, back East, so when the town marshal retired, I ran for the office." Delaney shrugged. "It's a job, and it keeps me in Tesqua."

"Always drink this much?"

"First time in months. Go on a binge once in a while—maybe because I'm a disappointed artist, if you want to get analytical, Lew. How's about joining me? Or did you ever write the Great Novel you were going to write?"

"Sure, I wrote it." Lew grinned. "Only nobody will publish it and if they did, I'm making more money in Hollywood. Here she comes."

"Here who comes?"

"Toni Lavalle. Who else? Don't look now, but that's Dake Correlli with her."

Delaney turned to look.

The most gorgeous, luscious blonde he had ever seen was weaving through the doorway from the hotel lobby. Lew Godey's two-handed gesture hadn't done her justice at all. Delaney whistled unconsciously but audibly.

Luckily, the blonde didn't seem to hear it. She crossed the room and took one of the stools at the bar. Sam came over to her very quickly. Vaguely, Delaney was aware that a man had entered the room with her, but Delaney's eyes were exclusively for the blonde.

Even from the back, she was more than worth looking at. She wore a short-skirted costume of some sort. Delaney tried to guess what sort, remembering that the picture from which she'd be reenacting a scene was a carnival picture, and decided that it was supposed to be an animal tamer's costume. A holster hanging from her belt bore out the guess.

The costume, what there was of it, was of scarlet silk. It left her shoulders and most of her back bare. Soft, golden hair tumbled in a page boy bob down over the softly rounded white shoulders.

Lew Godey said, "Don't get ideas, Delaney. She's engaged—to Dake."

"Is that an animal tamer's costume?"

"Check. That's her part in the picture and what she wears on the stage tonight. But in the picture itself I also wrote in a beach sequence where she wears a bathing suit. Still think you don't want to go see it?"

Delaney grunted. "How's about an introduction?"

"Sit and pant a while. It'll do you good."

But when Delaney glared, Lew Godey laughed and stood up. He said, "Give me a few minutes with them first, to talk business. Bill Wiley and I decided, over dinner tonight, on a few cuts

in the script. It was too long. I want to tell Toni and Dake about them. Then I'll call you over. Okay?"

"Sure." Delaney stood up too. "Think I'll get a breath of fresh air meanwhile."

Godey said, "You seem to know the bartender, Delaney. Wonder if you'd mind getting him aside, while I'm talking to them, and telling him to go light on Toni's drinks, cut them down a bit. Be pretty bad if she fell on her face tonight on the stage. I *think* she can handle it okay, but—"

"Sure," Delaney said. He caught Sam's eye and jerked his head toward the door to the lobby. He walked through and waited just beyond until Sam joined him, and told Sam what Lew had suggested.

Sam said, "Sure, Delaney. I was getting a little worried about the little lady myself. Gawd, ain't she beautiful?"

"A masterpiece of understatement," Delaney told him.

He went out into the cool evening and strolled across the Plaza to the bright marquee of the theater. He waved a greeting at Carmen Gonzalez, the ticket seller, and then stood looking at the advertising posters for the premiere.

"Richard Welsh in *CARNIVAL OF DEATH*, with Toni Lavalle and Dake Correlli," the billing read. But Richard Welsh, Lew had explained to him earlier, wouldn't be there; he was too important a player for Mackin Studios to send to Tesqua for a personal appearance. Tesqua would have to settle for the two supporting players, two others who had minor roles, and the director.

Delaney looked up to the corner to see if Ramon was in sight; Ramon was just coming into the Plaza. He'd known Ramon would be coming by about this time and would stop to talk to his sweetheart in the box office; that was why Delaney had just stepped out from the hotel. Ramon was the best deputy he'd ever had.

Delaney strolled to meet him. He said, "Hi, Ramon. Everything quiet?"

"Sure. Had to stop a knife fight down at the crap game, but nobody got hurt."

"Arrest either of them?"

"No. It was all right; they weren't going to fight any more. But two Indians from the Pueblo, I had to put them in jail. They were getting too noisy."

"Oh, Lord," said Delaney. "They'll sing all night. Keep everybody awake within a block of the jail. Well, if you had to jug them you had to." He jerked a thumb toward the theater. "Going to take in Tesqua's big event tonight?"

"Like to. Would it be all right?"

"Tell the night operator at the telephone company where you'll be if anything comes up."

Ramon grinned and thanked him.

Delaney said, "So long, Ramon. Don't take any wooden Indians."

He strolled back across the Plaza, through the bright moonlight. He remembered that he was going to meet Toni Lavalle and found himself walking faster. He slowed his steps down deliberately. Toni Lavalle was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but what was that to him? She was a starlet and he was town marshal of a one-horse town. And besides, her fiance was with her.

Suddenly he wished he'd not told Lew that he'd be back. He wanted to get into his car and drive out of town, up into the beautiful mountains, through the clear, cool, thin air. He wanted to let the night drive the cobwebs and the liquor out of his head; he was sorry for the moment that he'd started to drink tonight. And that meant that he'd better quit drinking—or else have another drink right away and quickly.

The fact that he'd promised Lew decided him. He went back into the lobby and from the lobby into the bar.

At first he thought they were not there any more. Then he saw that the party had been augmented by two new arrivals and that they'd taken the big table at the back of the room.

Lew waved to him and he walked over.

II

"Delaney, Miss Lavalle," Lew said.

Toni held out her hand and Delaney took it. He'd probably have forgotten to let go—and Toni was looking at him rather admiringly and seemed to have no inclination to pull her hand away—but Lew Godey was going on with the introductions.

"Dake Correlli."

And Delaney found himself looking at the man who'd entered the bar with the Luscious Lush. A tall, thin man with a face that wasn't a nice face at all. Almost cadaverous. He wore evening dress; the gleaming white of his shirt front made his skin look yellow.

He bared teeth so perfect that Delaney didn't believe in them, in what might have been a smile. He said, "The law in Tesqua, Lew tells us," and held out a hand that felt like a dead catfish. It was *both* cold and limp.

Delaney nodded and didn't hold the hand long.

"Herman Masterson."

Delaney shook hands with a man in one of the loudest suits he'd ever seen. The man grinned at him. "Don't let the suit

fool you. I'm a carney barker in the show."

"Walter Evers."

Delaney had to reach for a hand the size of a child's. Evers was a midget. He, or someone, had taken cushions out of a booth for him to sit on and until the hand stretched across the table for Delaney to take, his smallness hadn't been obvious.

Delaney took a vacant chair. Not next to Toni, but the next best thing—across the table from her. Sam came with the drinks the others had ordered and he had one for Delaney too.

Lew was explaining, "This is all the cast, Delaney, except Bill Wiley, our director. He'll be down in a minute, I guess. We got to get over to the theater early to run through a quick rehearsal, now that the script has been shortened. Or maybe, come to think of it, we should do it here. How much room is there at the theater, with the movie screen down?"

"Plenty," Delaney told him. "They use it for amateur theatricals, part of the time. Are you in the—skit or whatever you call it, Lew?"

"Me? I'm no actor. I'll watch with you from the audience, after things get going. The director's going to take a part, though. He'll emcee, and stand in for Welsh in one scene. Wish the studio had sent Welsh. Had a devil of a time making a good mystery script without the star."

Correlli said, "Like making a ham sandwich without the ham."

Delaney was surprised; Dake Correlli hadn't looked as though he had a sense of humor. Delaney glanced at him and decided that it was more malice than humor at that.

He said, "Surprised Welsh would be in a horror picture. Thought he stuck to Westerns. I've seen him in one or two."

Lew said, "We gave him a chance to wear his cowboy suit. He's a rodeo rider in the picture. Wait till you see the costume. Bill Wiley'll be wearing it."

"And you should see him in it," Toni said. "Six-gun and everything."

Delaney reached for his drink and it wasn't there. Instead there was a martini, with one sip missing. His own glass, empty, stood in front of Toni Lavalle.

She followed his glance and smiled at him. "Hope you won't mind, Delaney. I traded."

He frowned at her, but didn't sip the martini; he knew all too well what it would taste like. Sam hadn't been very subtle, probably; he'd used all ice water instead of gin. Delaney called out, "Sam. Another bourbon over ice."

When it came, he downed it.

Toni laughed. "Another round, Sam. On me. And with gin in my martini."

Sam glanced at Delaney. De-

laney looked at Lew, and Lew raised his eyebrows and shrugged. Delaney said, "You might as well, Sam." He didn't see what Lew was worrying about anyway; Toni showed, a little, that she'd been drinking, but she looked as though she could handle it all right. Her eyes were wide and bright—and the bluest he'd ever seen—but her voice wasn't fuzzy. Not really fuzzy, anyway.

Anyway, she didn't look as nearly drunk as Delaney felt.

She was powdering her nose now, and when she'd finished and had put her compact back in the big handbag she was carrying, she put the handbag from her lap onto the table. It clunked, as though it was loaded with lead.

"Carrying concealed weapons?" Delaney asked her.

She opened the handbag and took out a revolver. It was a big one, heavy, but Delaney saw it was only a twenty-two. "Sure I'm carrying one," she said. "Can you shoot, Delaney? Let's see how many bottles you can break at the bar with six shots."

Delaney grinned as he reached across and took it from her. He swung out the cylinder and popped the cartridges into his hand. He'd known they were blanks but he wanted to be sure. He put them back in and snapped the cylinder shut.

"Nice gun," he said. He handed it back.

"Makes me lopsided to carry it in that holster, though." She put it back into the handbag. "Where are those drinks?"

The drinks came and then Sam had to go back for another for Bill Wiley, the director, who got to the table about the same time the drinks did. He said, "Hi-yo, Silver. Away."

He pulled up a chair from another table after he and Delaney had been introduced. Lew and Toni hadn't exaggerated about his costume. It was the rodeo-est looking cowboy costume Delaney had ever seen, and in the brightest colors. A Colt forty-five hung from his belt in the fanciest silver-mounted holster that ever held a shooting iron.

The talk went Hollywood and Delaney quit listening. He watched Toni Lavalle and occasionally caught her looking at him. He looked at Dake Correlli, next to her, and got a cold, fishy stare that matched the cold-fish handshake he'd been given.

Delaney decided maybe he'd better not have another drink right away. If he had, he might take a notion to punch Dake Correlli's face for him. He wondered what a girl like Toni was doing being engaged to a man like Correlli. Or, for that matter, why she drank as much as Lew had told him she did. May-

be, he thought, she drank because she was engaged to Correlli, but that didn't make much sense. One can always break an engagement.

He wished they'd go ahead and start their rehearsing, so he could have another drink. For Lew's sake, he didn't want to order or suggest another round. He knew Lew was worried about whether Toni would get by, even with what she'd already had.

Bill Wiley, the director, must have read Delaney's mind. He said, "Well, gang, we'd better get over there for a run-through."

Delaney got up with the rest of them and trailed along as far as the bar. He turned down an invitation to go over with them. Lew said, "I'll be back to get you, Delaney, before it starts."

Delaney ordered a double from Sam as they were going out of the door. He had it in front of him on the bar as the door opened again.

It was Toni. She grinned at him. "Forgot something."

He wrapped his hand around the glass in front of him. He said, "It wasn't this. I'll buy you one, but don't pilfer. Stealing is against the law here,"

She slid onto the stool next to him and said, "A double, Sam. And make it quick."

Delaney looked at her. "Did you fool anybody, coming back?"

"Only myself, Delaney. And that I don't care about. Are you really coming to see the show?"

"Lew will come back and drag me across if I don't. But maybe by that time I'll be seeing it double."

"That would be twice as bad. Don't. It smells. Oh, it isn't Lew's fault—or Bill's. The script and the directing are okay. It's just that you can't make a good picture on a shoestring."

"Maybe it won't be so bad," Delaney said. "Good pictures have been made on a shoestring. Look at 'It Happened One Night.' "

"It won't happen tonight. Well—"

Toni's drink was in front of her and she lifted it. Delaney lifted his and said, "To you, Toni."

They downed both drinks and suddenly they were looking at one another. Toni's eyes jerked away. She said, "Forget it, Delaney. You're a nice guy, but—"

She slid off the stool and started toward the door, just as it opened and Dake Correlli stood there. He didn't say anything, just held the door open for her. She went out without turning around to look back.

Delaney said, "Another double, Sam."

Sam brought it, but he said, "Aren't you hitting them a little fast, Delaney?"

Delaney said, "Yes. Want to make something of it? . . . I'm

sorry, Sam. Okay, I'll take 'em a little slower."

He made that one last until Lew came back.

But he had one more with Lew, when Lew admitted they had a few minutes left.

He said, "Lew, what's the set-up on Toni Lavalle? How long has she been drinking like that? And how long has she been engaged to this zombie Correlli?"

"A few months, to both questions. But look, Delaney, there may be a connection or there may not be, but you can't do anything about it if there is. Look, if you're falling for The Lavalle, skip the premiere and don't rub it into yourself. I've *got* to go, but you can just sit there and get quietly drunk—I mean, the *rest* of the way drunk. The picture probably isn't much good."

Delaney grinned. "If enough people try to talk me out of going, Lew, I'll go even if I have to pay to get in. Ready?"

Lew shrugged and got off the stool. As they walked across the Plaza, he said, "I'm curious myself what Toni sees in him, but you can never tell what women will go for. Maybe she likes him *because* he's a creep."

"What do you know about him?"

"He can't act, but he's crazy to. Oh, I guess he's adequate in character parts or heavies. He's the heavy in this one—plays the hypnotist in the side-show."

Delaney thought that over and concentrated on walking straight as they neared the marquee of the theater.

His deputy, Ramon Garcia, was talking to his sweetheart, the ticket seller. Delaney introduced him to Godey and asked, "Mind if he sits with us, among the elect, Lew? He wants to see the picture—God knows why."

"Sure," Lew said. "There'll be room."

"And for Carmen, when she closes the box office?"

"Sure."

Inside the theater there was bedlam of excited conversation, mostly in Spanish. The lights were on and the movie screen had been pulled up to make way for the regular curtain.

They came to the roped-off row. Most of the seats in it were vacant. Delaney let Ramon and Lew go in first so he could take the aisle seat. A minute later he stood up to let Carmen past him so she could sit next to Ramon. The theater was sold out, so she'd been able to close the box office before the premiere started.

It was hot and stuffy in the little theater. Delaney closed his eyes but half a minute later a sudden hush made him open them again. The curtain had gone up and Bill Wiley, gorgeous in the borrowed raiment of the missing star, was walking onto the stage.

Wiley said, "Friends of the

great motion picture audience—"

Delaney closed his eyes again. He didn't open them until he heard Toni's voice and knew she was on stage. She and the barker and the midget were enacting a scene from the movie. Wiley, having introduced them, was standing at one side, almost in the wings.

After a few lines Toni, acting angry about something, strode off the stage. He dozed, just a little.

The first shot woke him.

He watched the murder. He stood up, slowly, his head still fuzzy from the drinks.

He hadn't moved fast, but apparently nobody else was moving at all. The figures on the stage might have been posing as a tableau. Toni, the gun dangling from one hand and the other hand over her mouth as though to stop more screams, stood staring down at the body lying across the stage before her. Wiley still stood near the wings. The midget and the barker stood beside him, staring. Delaney figured they'd been on stage but had rushed back at the sound of Toni's scream which hadn't been in the script.

Delaney shook his head to clear it and then stepped over the low rope into the aisle. He turned his back to the stage and looked around at the audience first. He said, "Keep your seats, everyone. Please don't move or leave. Except you, Smitty, and you, Luis."

That was a break; both his other deputies besides Ramon had been off duty, but they were both at the show. He didn't have to tell Ramon to come. Ramon was already making his way to the aisle. Lew Godey was hesitating. Delaney said, "Okay, Lew. Come on."

He led the procession of five of them down the aisle and up over the low footlights onto the stage.

III

Delaney knelt beside Dake Correlli and put his hand over the chest. Not that he really doubted Correlli was dead. There were six holes in that white shirt front, all of them turning red. They were all within a six or seven inch circle and at least one, possibly three, would have hit the heart.

His hand touched what seemed like padding. Bill Wiley's voice, over his shoulder said, "He's got a half-inch-thick pad under there. On account of wads from the blanks. They sting."

Delaney grunted and ripped open the shirt front and lifted the pad. He put his hand over the heart and found out what he already knew.

He motioned to the three deputies and told them to carry the body off stage. He said, "Off

stage, all of you. Around behind the curtain and wait for me."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw that some in the audience were starting to get up from their seats. Delaney barked at them and they sat down again.

Seth Wheeler, the manager of the theater, was coming down the aisle, apparently from his office. Delaney motioned him to come on and when Seth got close enough, said, "Is the movie ready? Can you run it now?"

"Sure, Delaney. Soon as I lower the screen."

"Get going, then."

He told the audience, "Something not in the play has happened, but it isn't going to interfere with the running of this show. You're all going to sit here and see the movie and stay out of my hair. Anybody who wants to spend the night in the jug can just come around backstage—inside or outside. Or within half a block of the hotel."

He walked off stage. Seth Wheeler was standing by the ropes, ready to lower the movie screen and Delaney nodded to him to go ahead. He said, "And pull up the backdrop, so we'll have room back here, Seth."

He went over to the two deputies who were standing by the body they'd just moved. Ramon had taken up a post by the only door.

Delaney said, "Phone Haines Mortuary, Smitty, and tell them to come over and get this. And phone Doc Graham to come too. If the mortuary wagon gets here first, let 'em take it. Doc can follow it over there to make his examinaiton."

Smitty, his only Anglo deputy of the three, nodded and went to the phone.

Delaney walked on over to the little group around Toni Lavalle, for whom someone had found a chair. The director, the midget, the barker, and Lew were all there.

Delaney asked, "Are you all right, Toni? Can you tell me what happened?"

She looked up at him with wide blue eyes. "I—I guess I'm all right, now. But I don't know what happened. Somebody—must have put real bullets in the gun instead of blanks. I—I need a drink, Delaney. Can we—go back to La Fonda?"

"In a minute, maybe. Tell me about the gun. Where you put it when you got here, what you did with it from the time you left the bar."

"It was in my handbag then. You remember. When I got here, I put my bag down on the table over there around the corner, by the door. I didn't wear the gun for the rehearsal—could not have shot it anyway, because I'd just brought the six blanks, not a box of them. It was there while we were rehearsing—and afterwards, while we were wait-

ing to go on. I don't like to wear it in the holster—it's so heavy it makes me lopsided—so I didn't get it until Bill actually went out on the stage to start things."

Delaney nodded. "Someone, then, substituted real bullets during that time. It'd've been nearly half an hour, plenty of time. I won't waste time asking if anybody wants to admit doing it, but I will ask this: Did anybody see anybody else going around that corner to where the table and the door are?"

Nobody answered for a few seconds and then Bill Wiley said, "I guess, Delaney, any one of us might have. All of us were in and out of the script at various times and the ones who weren't in stepped back, as though we were going into the wings. I'd say offhand that each of us was back there—or might have been—at one time or another, either during the rehearsal or afterwards."

Delaney nodded again. He caught Lew's eye and Lew shrugged his shoulders.

Delaney said, "I don't know about the rest of you—except Toni—but me, I'd rather ask the rest of the questions I'll have to ask across the street, over a glass. But there's one little thing first."

It was Walter Evers, the carney barker, who asked, "What?"

"Somebody switched real bullets for blanks," Delaney said. "I don't know why that person would be so stupid as to have the blanks he took out of the gun still on him, but he might have. Sometimes people *are* stupid. Is there anyone here who minds being searched, before we go across the street, to see if he has six twenty-two blanks on his person?"

He looked down at Toni Lavalle and said, "I'm afraid that means you too, Toni. But my deputy's girl-friend is in the audience; we can get her to do it."

Toni said, "Sure, Delaney. That's all right." Delaney looked around at the others, one at a time, and got nods or yesses from the four men.

The searching was thorough, but with three deputies to help and Ramon's Carmen to search Toni, it didn't take long. While it was going on, the wagon from the mortuary took away the body and Doc Graham arrived and was sent after the wagon to make his examination at the mortuary.

By half past midnight six of them—Delaney, Lew, and four out of the five who had had parts in the script—were back at the big round table in the bar of the hotel.

Delaney ordered a round of drinks.

Lew asked, "What's the score, Delaney? I mean, what's the setup here? Are you in charge of the investigation, or do you send

for the sheriff of the county or what?"

"I'll notify him. And he'll drop over to give me a hand if I need one, but I doubt if he comes tonight. The county seat's sixty miles from here, and tough driving through the mountains at that."

He looked at Toni Lavalle. She looked pale and shaken, but more beautiful than ever. She asked him, "Am—am I under arrest, Delaney?"

"Did you switch bullets in the gun?"

She shook her head.

"Then why would you be under arrest?" Delaney looked around at the others. "Toni here pulled the trigger, but that isn't murder if she didn't know there were real bullets in the gun she had. But someone sitting at this table made the switch."

Bill Wiley had been staring at his drink; now he looked up. He said, "I don't see how you can say that so positively, Delaney. For one thing, there was one other person besides us who was backstage while we were rehearsing. The manager of the theater was there for a while."

"Seth is out. He's lived in Tesqua all his life and Correlli had never been here. He didn't know any of you. He couldn't have had a motive on a bet. And —had he seen the script?"

He looked at Lew and Lew shook his head.

Delaney said, "An even better reason, then. He couldn't have known what switching blanks for bullets would accomplish. He wouldn't even have known the gun was in Toni's handbag or if or how it would be used on the stage."

Wiley said, "I guess I'll have to give you that point, Delaney. But how do you know the switch was made at the theater? It might have been done in Toni's room this afternoon. If she hasn't checked the gun since then, it might have been done back in Hollywood before we left there —by someone there who knew the script we'd use but didn't come along to Tesqua."

Delaney remembered that Bill Wiley hadn't come down to the bar yet at the time Toni had shown him her gun and he'd opened it and checked that there were blanks in it.

He told Wiley about that and then asked Toni what had happened on the way across the Plaza to the theater.

She puckered her brow. "We all left together, you remember. But just outside, not twenty steps from the door, I decided I wanted a quickie and I told them I'd left my compact at the table and was coming back for it, and to wait for me. Dake and Lew both offered to come, but I said no. I guess most of them knew what I was coming back for, really.

"But they all waited right outside, except that after a few minutes Dake came to the door to get me. You remember."

Lew said, "That's right, Delaney. We were all just outside and saw her come in and out again. And she had the handbag with her all the time."

Delaney nodded, and ordered another round of drinks. He said, "Then the switch was made at the theater. And the question is, what did the switcher do with the blanks that were in the gun? That's what worries me."

He looked around the table again. He said, "That's what worries me. The blanks should be somewhere at the theater, backstage. And all three of my deputies are looking for them—and haven't found them yet, or one of them would have come over and told me. I told them to take the place apart until they find those blanks. They should have found them by now; it's a pretty limited area."

Lew Godey moved uneasily in his chair. He said, "I hope they do find them, Delaney. I guess you know why."

"Sure," Delaney said. "You were the only one—outside of Seth, and he doesn't count—who was in there and out again. You could have made the switch and thrown the blanks away outside, on your way back here. Or hid them in the Plaza. Only it would have been a silly thing to do, Lew, because if you'd left the blanks at the theater, it would be among five people. And if we find them in the Plaza—well, none of the others left. It would put you in a bad spot."

Lew nodded. "For which reason, I sure hope your good men find them at the theater. Are they searching the Plaza too?"

"Mañana," Delaney said. "Which, if anybody doesn't know, means 'in the morning.' None of the rest of you left the backstage area at all? Even to use the washroom?"

"I did," Bill Wiley told him. "I think someone else did, but I'm not sure—"

"Me," said Toni. "Or rather, I. I powdered my nose. Can I have another drink?"

He heard the door open and turned. Ramon was coming in. He looked around and then walked over to Delaney. He shook his head.

"Practically took the place apart," he said. "They aren't there."

"Outside the windows?"

"Both windows are stuck. Couldn't have been opened. Someone might have stepped outside the door and thrown them, but we used our flashlights over a pretty wide area, but no luck."

"Washroom?"

Ramon shook his head again. "We even took the plumbing apart."

Delaney sighed. "They've *got* to be there, Ramon. Afraid you'd better go over all of it again, and cover a wider area outside the door. I know twenty-two blanks are small, but dammit there are six of them."

"Okay, Delaney. We'll go over it again. What I don't see is why anybody hid them at all. All they'd have to do is drop them in the drawer of the table that Miss Lavalle's purse was lying on—or just stick them out of sight anywhere. But someone sure went to a lot of trouble to hide them well."

That had been puzzling Delaney too. When Ramon had left, he looked around the table again. He said, "I don't expect *one* of you to answer this because he knows the answer for sure. But do any of the others of you have any ideas? Any of you happen to see any blank cartridges?"

He got head-shakes, except from Bill Wiley, who said, "Only the blanks in my own gun, and they're forty-fives."

"Were you supposed to shoot them off, later in the script?"

"I was to take one shot, yet. But I put in six blanks so I wouldn't have to worry about keeping the cylinder in the right position for the blank to be under the hammer when I shot."

Lew Godey yawned. He said, "I know this ought to be exciting, Delaney, especially with me the main suspect unless you find those blanks, but I'm dead tired. Got hardly any sleep last night. How are chances for my turning in?"

"Go ahead," Delaney told him. "And that goes for any of the rest of you, as long as you stay inside the hotel."

He stood up when Lew did. He said, "Think I'll drop over and see how the boys are coming at the theater. I'll be back, though, if any of you are sticking around."

The others stayed at the table. He walked with Lew into the lobby, said, " 'Night, Lew. See you in the morning," and went outside. But not far; he waited two minutes just outside the door and then went back into the lobby and over to the desk.

He got the number of Dake Correlli's room from the night clerk and got the key Correlli had turned in when he'd left. Not that Delaney really needed the key. The locks on the doors at La Fonda were the old-fashioned kind that almost any key would open.

He went up the stairs and to Correlli's room. He bent down and looked into the keyhole before he tried the key the clerk had given him. There was a key already there, from the inside.

IV

Delaney knocked on the door, quietly. When there wasn't any

answer, he said, "It's me, Lew. Might as well let me in."

After a few seconds, the door opened. Lew Godey, carefully deadpan, said, "Hi, Delaney."

Delaney walked past him into the room. He closed the door, but didn't lock it. Instead he took the key out from the inside and handed it back to Lew. He took his hat off and hung it over the knob so no light would show through the keyhole. He'd already noticed, from outside, that the door fitted tightly, no crack of light showing at the bottom or sides.

He said, "Let's talk quietly, Lew. There may be more visitors. Or do you think so?"

Lew Godey nodded.

Delaney looked around him. The room was in considerable disorder, partly because of the searching Lew had been doing, partly because Dake Correlli had left it that way. Lew could be blamed for the opened dresser drawers, the suitcases, opened and pawed through, lying on the bed. But the glasses and bottles on the table, the overflowing ash trays, would have been as Correlli had left them.

Delaney picked up an almost full bottle of bourbon and poured himself a generous slug. He looked at Lew and Lew said, "I might as well, now." Delaney poured a shot for him and handed it over.

"Blackmail, Lew?"

Lew Godey took a draught of the raw whiskey. "Yes," he said. "Blackmail. Three of us, I think."

"Toni? Bill Wiley?"

Lew nodded. He sat down on the edge of the bed. He said, "Me, anyway. I think the others. Don't know why Toni would have been engaged to him otherwise. Or have agreed to act in a pic like 'Carnival of Death.' And as for Wiley—well, Dake knew in advance that Wiley would go to bat for getting the picture made."

He drank the rest of the whiskey in his glass and took a deep breath. "A year ago Dake came to me and asked me to do a script for a horror pic that would give him a nice fat role as a heavy, a role tailor-made for him. I said I wasn't interested—and—well, he convinced me I'd better be interested. I made a mistake once, Delaney, about six years ago, just before I got a start in Hollywood. Not too bad a one—maybe they wouldn't even prosecute me by now. But Correlli had documentary evidence of it—and it would have ruined me in Hollywood, lost me my job and got me blacklisted to boot.

"So I wrote the script. Dake told me he could guarantee it would be produced—that he knew a director who'd like it and talk his studio into letting him do it, and that the director would listen to his, Dake's, sug-

gestions on the casting. So I figured—and still figure—that he had something on Wiley like he had on me. Or worse."

"And Toni?"

"You saw Correlli. He was a creep. He was twenty years older than she. It *must* have been blackmail, Delaney. I don't think they were really planning actually to get married, though. My guess is Dake just liked to be seen around with a starlet and to add to his own rep by being engaged to her. And I'd guess that, it being a choice between submitting to that or throwing away her career, Toni would go around with him. Even that was enough to start her drinking. But as for actually marrying him, I think she'd have left Hollywood for jail rather than do that. In fact, I'm sure of it."

"Find what you were looking for, Lew?"

Godey shook his head. "I was just starting on the suitcases when you knocked. I'd looked about everywhere else."

"Any reason for thinking he'd bring whatever he had on you to Tesqua with him?"

"Just a hunch, Delaney. But from Dake's character, I think he would. Besides, he was considering taking a minor stage engagement in New York; he was not sure he was going back to Hollywood from here, and I don't think he'd have left it there."

Delaney sighed. He said, "We'll make sure. If he carried it, it was probably in a good hiding place, not loose among his clothes and stuff. Did you examine the suitcases thoroughly?"

"Just starting on them when you came. Shall I—?"

"Dump one and hand me the case while you look through the contents."

The second suitcase was pay dirt. There was a cleverly made secret compartment in the lid. Delaney almost missed it; he might have if the second suitcase hadn't been a mate to the first except that the lid had seemed a trifle thicker.

There were three envelopes in the compartment. They were sealed, blank on front. He turned them over and saw a faint penciled initial on the bottom right corner of each. One was "W," one "G" and one "R."

He was looking at those initials when there was a faint sound from the door, the sound of a key being fitted into the lock.

He stuffed the envelopes into his pocket and crossed quickly to the door and threw it open. He said, "Come in, Mr. Wiley. It wasn't locked."

Bill Wiley, still in the costume he'd worn on stage, still with the forty-five hanging from his belt, stood there looking foolish. He put a key back into his pock-

et and entered the room. Delaney closed the door again.

He said, "Sit down, Mr. Wiley. We were waiting for you." He turned back to Lew and asked, "Does the initial *R* mean anything to you, Lew?"

"What do you mean, Delaney?" He looked at the three envelopes Delaney was holding out toward him and saw the three penciled initials. "Oh," he said. "Yes, I guess that's Toni. Lavalle is stage, of course. Her real name's Antoinette Reid." He reached out to take the envelopes, or at least the one marked "G" for Godey, but Delaney slid them back into his coat pocket.

He asked Wiley, "Is Toni still in the bar? Did you leave her there?"

Wiley nodded. "Getting high as a kite."

"She'll be up soon, I think. If not, we'll send for her. But we might as well wait for a few minutes. Probably she's waiting for you to have time to get to your room and then she'll be along up here."

"Why?"

Delaney said, "Same reason you're here, Wiley. And Lew. Maybe you knew it and maybe you didn't, but Correlli was blackmailing all three of you."

His eyes were somber.

Wiley nodded slowly. "Those envelopes—?"

"Yes," Delaney said.

"What are you going to do about it?"

Delaney said, "I'm going to have a drink of Correlli's liquor." He was getting a little sober again. He didn't like it. He picked up the bottle and looked from Lew to Wiley. Lew shook his head this time but Wiley said, "A short one. Are you going to open those envelopes, Delaney?"

Delaney handed him a glass. "One of them, yes. Don't ask me which one. I don't know yet."

He downed his own drink, a generous one, and went across to the telephone. He asked the night clerk to get him Ramon at the theater. When Ramon's voice came on the phone, he said, "Delaney, Ramon. Find those blanks?"

"No. They just aren't *here*, Delaney. We went over everything indoors again, all three of us. Then I sent Smitty and Luis out to cover everything within possible throwing distance from the doorway while I've been making a third hunt inside. I've even been looking under matchsticks on the floor and breaking up cigarette butts."

Delaney sighed. "Okay, Ramon. If they're not there you can't find them. Finish whatever you're doing and come on over here. I'm in Room two-eleven. Tell Smitty and Luis when they finish outside to go home and get a few hours sleep but to come

back as soon as it's light enough to search the Plaza. We won't even try that tonight—and I don't think they're there anyway."

He put down the phone and crossed over to the bottle again. But before he tilted it he put it down quickly and went to the door. He opened it and said, "Come in, Toni."

She stood there, swaying slightly. Her eyes seemed to have difficulty focusing on him. Her face flushed and then composed itself. She said, "What are you doing in my—?" and then her eyes went from Delaney to the panel of the door and the number on the panel. "Sorry," she corrected herself. "Got the wrong room. Mine's down the hall." He noticed that her voice had thickened quite a bit, although she managed, with an effort, to enunciate clearly.

He said, "Come on in, Toni. Lew and Bill Wiley are here."

She hesitated only a second and then walked past him and sat down on the sofa. She looked across at the glasses and bottles on the table. "Can I have a drink, Delaney?"

Delaney closed the door. "Sure," he said.

He fixed one for her and one for himself. Wiley and Godey both shook their heads.

Delaney took his to the sofa and sat down. Godey still sat on the bed and Bill Wiley leaned against the closed door. He said, "Well?" as Toni sat beside Delaney. "What are you going to do?" He looked at Toni and told her, "You missed the first act, Toni. He has three envelopes. Dake was blackmailing all three of us, one way or another."

Toni put her free hand on Delaney's arm. She asked, "Have you—opened mine, Delaney?"

He shook his head, or started to. It made the room swim, so he said, "No," instead. He was, he knew, definitely getting drunk. That wasn't good. Why, of all nights, had he picked tonight to get drunk—and why hadn't he had sense enough to stop drinking when a murder had been committed? There was a reason, but he decided not to think about it.

He said, "One of you three killed Dake Correlli. By switching real bullets for the blanks. Maybe we can figure out which one of you did it. Or would it bore you to talk about it?"

Nobody answered that; apparently it wouldn't bore them. Lew Godey leaned across the footboard of the bed and poured himself a drink. Delaney handed his glass to Lew; he said, "I might as well be drunk as the way I am."

He said, "What I can't understand is why somebody did something fancy with the blanks. They aren't at the theater. We didn't find them searching any

of you. It would seem that they were disposed of away from the theater—and that lets Bill Wiley out, because he didn't leave there."

Lew said, "Delaney, that lets Toni out too. She didn't leave either."

"She didn't, but just the same she could have dropped the blanks in the Plaza. She had the gun in her handbag all along. After I'd looked at it in the bar downstairs, she could have taken the blanks out, while the handbag was lying in her lap. On her way across the Plaza she could have dropped them in the grass, even though she was walking with the rest of you. That would have left the gun empty, and she had as much chance as anyone else, backstage, to put the real bullets in the gun."

Toni said, "You're right, Delaney. I could have."

Delaney took a thoughtful sip of his drink. He said, "That looks like it narrows it down—to you, Bill."

Wiley's eyes went wide. "You're kidding, Delaney. You just got through saying that it *eliminated* me. I'm the only one who couldn't have got rid of the blanks."

"That's right," Delaney said. "But, Bill, you're the only one who would even have thought of trying to get rid of them. Don't you see, Bill, either of the others would have just left the blanks at the theater, where they'd be found easily? If Lew had made the switch, he would not have taken the blanks away with him. If Toni had made it, she wouldn't have got rid of the blanks outside before she put the bullets in."

Wiley said, "I don't see your reasoning on that, Delaney."

Delaney took another sip. He said, "Bill, you were the only one who wasn't there, at the table in the bar, when I swung the cylinder on Toni's twenty-two and saw that there were blanks in it at that time. You didn't know I'd done that, so you were the only one who didn't know that there wasn't any reason for doing anything fancy with the blanks—that if you'd just dropped them into a drawer of the table there, or left them anywhere out of sight at the theater, there'd be no lead to who'd made the switch.

"But you didn't know that, so you thought if the blanks couldn't be found, we'd assume that the switch could have been made any time—here at the hotel, even back in Hollywood. Toni, we'd have thought, could have made a mistake when she loaded the gun—or put bullets instead of blanks in it on purpose. You thought if the blanks were hidden successfully, there'd be no proof that blanks had ever been in the gun or that the switch had been made at the theater at

the last minute. But everyone except you knew that there *were* blanks in the gun while Toni was in the bar. Nobody else would have had any reason to get fancy."

Wiley frowned. "How could I have got fancy? If *I* made the switch, what did I do with the blanks?"

"That's the trouble," Delaney admitted. "I haven't a goddam idea what you could have done with the blanks. All I know is you must have done it somehow. And I know this was a planned crime, Bill. You decided to do it and worked it out while you were back in Hollywood, when you read the script. You worked out a way of hiding the blanks before you even came here. And the funny part of it is that if you *hadn't,* if you'd just left the blanks anywhere, you'd have gotten away with it."

"Delaney, you're drunk."

"Sure," said Delaney. "But shut up, and let me think."

There was a knock on the door. Delaney recognized it and said, "Come on, Ramon."

Ramon came in. His eyes went to the table with the bottles. He said, "No luck, Delaney. They just aren't there. We did everything but peel the plaster off the walls—and we did that a place or two where it was cracked wide enough to push a twenty-two blank through."

"Good," Delaney said. "All right, go ahead and take a drink. I won't watch."

He looked at Lew instead while Ramon made himself a drink. He said, "Lew, you've worked on mystery stories and read a lot of them. What are some good gimmicks for hiding something?"

Lew Godey said, "Read a clever one once. Murderer had to get rid of a derringer. Had an owl ready. Tied the derringer to the owl's leg and let it fly away."

"Hmm," said Delaney. "You didn't notice Bill here carrying an owl tonight, did you? Try another."

Lew said, "Of course the classic example is Poe's 'The Purloined Letter.' The hidden letter was in the letter-rack, merely made to look like a different letter instead of the one they were looking for."

Delaney stared at him. He said, "Lew, you're a genius. Will you pour me another drink?" He handed over his empty glass and looked at Wiley. But he spoke to Ramon Garcia. He said, "Arrest him, Ramon. And take his gun and give it to me."

Bill Wiley turned as though he was going to make a break for the door, but suddenly there was a gun in Ramon's hand and Wiley turned back. His face was pale, but his voice stayed calm. He said, "You win, Delaney."

Delaney stood up. The floor

was a bit instable, but he kept his feet while he took the forty-five revolver that Ramon pulled out of Wiley's hand-tooled holster and handed to him. He walked to the table and broke out the forty-five caliber blank cartridges, six of them. He took a penknife from his pocket and pried out the cardboard in the front end of one of them. There wasn't any powder in it—but a little twenty-two caliber blank fell out of the forty-five caliber blank and rolled across the table.

He looked across at Wiley and shook his head sadly. "You had one drink too few, Bill," he said. "If you'd got down to the bar ten minutes earlier and had known I'd just looked inside Toni's gun, you wouldn't have taken the trouble of going back to the washroom after you'd switched the blanks for the bullets and putting the blanks in the hiding place you had ready for them. And if you hadn't—if you'd just left the blanks in the drawer of the table or somewhere—we'd never have been able to prove who did the switching. Even if we knew, we could not have proved it. All right, Ramon, take him down to the jug."

As Ramon left with Wiley, Delaney abandoned the floor as too treacherous and sat back on the sofa. He took the three envelopes from his pocket and handed the one marked *G* to Lew Godey. He said, "Better burn it, Lew. Before somebody else gets it."

Lew's voice was a little husky. "Thanks, Delaney. Thanks a million." He went out and closed the door behind him.

Delaney put the envelope marked *W* back into his pocket and handed the remaining one to Toni Lavalle.

Her eyes widened, but she took it. She took the lighter he handed her, too. Her hands trembled as they crumpled the envelope, unopened, into the ashstand beside her end of the sofa, flicked the lighter and touched flame to the wad of paper. She watched as the flame consumed the paper and then her eyes were bright with tears as they turned back to look at Delaney.

She said, "I'm so h-happy I could c-cry."

"You're drunk, Toni," he told her, "or you'd know that you *are* crying. Want another drink?"

"No. Drunk enough now. And I'm through drinking, Delaney—drinking too much, I mean. Won't have to now."

She put her head on Delaney's shoulder. "Delaney, I'm — sleepy." Her eyes closed and her breathing became slow and regular.

Delaney looked down at her face and smiled. He looked at the bottle on the table and wish-

ed he could reach it for one last drink without disturbing the sleeping girl. And then his head started swimming again and he realized that he neither needed or wanted another drink. He'd had too much already. Enough to last him a long time. He put his head back on the back of the sofa and closed his eyes . . .

It was half an hour later that Ramon Garcia returned. He opened the door and stood looking down. Then, very quietly, he turned out the light and closed and locked the door.

He went down to the desk in the lobby where Consuelo Ramirez, the night clerk, sat reading a love story magazine. He said, "Querida, don't put through any calls to Room two-eleven. And give me one of your 'Do Not Disturb' signs so I can go back and put it on the knob so in the morning the maid won't bother them."

"Them?" Consuelo's dark eyes flashed with interest. "Who? Miss Lavalle, the movie star, and Delaney? You mean he is—they are—"

Ramon's teeth gleamed white. "At the moment, no," he said. "But mañana. I'd bet on it, mañana."

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suicide pact

by . . . Peter Harris

If you've parted from your wife on a desolate lake — just how understanding will the Law be? Particularly if she can't swim!

MY DEAR INSPECTOR, I know you have your sordid duty to do, but for my own part I hope that Stella is never found. I like to think of her as drifting gently on the surface of the lake.

If my nerve had not so unaccountably failed me, I should now be with her in that watery grave. I shall always reproach myself for not keeping faith with her. Dear Stella! When she said "Goodbye," and I heard her lowering herself into the water from the side of the boat, she could not have guessed that I would choose to stay alive.

But perhaps it takes more courage to live, and I ask myself whether perhaps I do not owe it to the world to give it the fruits of my creative genius for a few more years. The world will not be grateful, of course.

Fortunately Stella has left me well provided for. That, of course, is of small consequence in itself, but I am grateful that I will not have to suffer the grinding poverty that was my lot before we met.

I should like to spend that

We've a disturbing incredible suspicion that this is quite the most amazing murder mystery in very brief compass we've read since we were knee-high to a cricket. It's amazing because instead of becoming utterly disastrous to the suspect at the very end it brightens like a July sky after a thunderstorm. And yet — that very brightening is terrifying.

money on the construction of a shrine by the lakeside—a monument to all who meet death by water. Yet perhaps it would be better to devote it to satisfying my few material wants while I pursue the stringent discipline of the artist. My paintings shall be Stella's shrine, Inspector, a monument to our devotion.

When did we first contemplate putting an end to our lives? Believe me, Inspector, the thought of death was never far from us, even at moments when ordinary, insensitive people—people like yourself, if I may say so—would have deemed us happy.

If I might just help myself to another of your cigarettes? My own are still in the boat.

Where was I? Ah, yes, the shadow of death! I believe it fell upon us the very first day we met. I had gone to fullfil a small commission at her uncle's place. He wanted me to paint his incredibly ugly house. The moment I set foot in the drawing-room and saw his taste in art —so photographic, so out of touch with contemporary trends —I knew that I was making a mistake. But even an artist must eat.

I never finished the painting. The old boor seemed to divine the spark of love that had been kindled between Stella and myself. In fact, he practically flung me out of the house. But Stella came with me, though we both sensed that there was a fatal quality about our love.

Mind you, Inspector, our path was not exactly smooth. No woman can live with a man who is constantly preoccupied with his creative experiences without feeling a certain resentment. So when our neighbors tell you that we sometimes quarreled, and that Stella even threatened to leave me, you will be able to place that information in proper perspective against the broader background.

We took this lakeside cottage so that I would have leisure and freedom to paint. But I felt from the start that our visit was to be of greater ultimate significance. For a few days nothing went right, and I spent my evenings scraping off the work that had taken me all day to execute.

I had reached a pitch of utter black depression, Inspector—a depression such as only a sensitive soul can experience. Stella responded to my mood. Last night, we talked it over, and decided that the times were hopelessly unpropitious for the true artist.

I felt—and Stella agreed with me—that our society was on the brink of disaster. Who were we to live in a tottering world? Have you never been troubled by such thoughts, Inspector? Probably not.

After supper we decided to row out on the lake, though we

had never done so before. We would surrender ourselves to the impulse of the moment. Perhaps we should live—perhaps not.

We had seen a boat moored further along the lakeside. We cut it adrift and I rowed Stella out into the darkness. There was no glimmer of light anywhere except from one cottage window.

As I rowed I could see the light of that cottage getting farther and farther away. It seemed to symbolize the fading light of our lives. I remarked on this to Stella.

For a long time I rowed and then when I judged that we had gone far enough—it was too dark to see our exact position—I rested, and we sat for a few minutes in contemplation. There was no need for words, Inspector—our accord was absolute. We were to die. It would be easy, for Stella could not swim at all and I could manage only a few feeble strokes.

Suddenly my darling leaned across and brushed my face with her lips. Then, with the one word, "Goodbye," she let the waters receive her without a cry.

Suddenly that shocking reality of a choking death came home to me. I am so sensitive to such impressions. I found to my amazement that I could not follow her—it was as though my limbs were weighted with ice.

What could I do? I threw a kiss to the silent waters, and began to row back in the direction of the light.

Of course I will sign it, Inspector. You need not read it back to me. How can I amend the truth? Truth is unalterable.

"YOU DAMNED FOOL," said the Inspector when the artist had signed the statement. "It's an attempted murder charge for you. You rowed three hundred yards too far and pushed the girl out into four feet of water twenty yards from the opposite bank. She's caked in mud and as mad as hell."

behind the star

by . . . William E. Barrett

There are two ways of making a good cop fighting mad. One is to call him yellow. The other is to shake a girl's trust in her man.

THE ROARING PRESSES of the dailies were thundering at full capacity, and, on the streets of the city, the newsboys were selling their papers as fast as they received them. The headlines shrieked the message: *Baby Killers Elude Police.*

Upstairs in the office of the Chief of Police, Michael Costigan, the reporters were clamoring for more details to placate the insatiable demands of an aroused public. With his heavy body planted firmly in his swivel-chair, Costigan met the charge.

"I have nothing to say and that's all you'll get out of me," he said. "Help yourselves to cigars and beat it."

The chief waved a heavy hand to open a cigar box on his desk and rose abruptly as a signal that the interview was over. Corbett, oldest police reporter on the run, leaned across the desk.

"Come out of it, Chief," he said earnestly. "This nothing-to-say malarkey is okay when a cheap hood is rubbed out. But this is different. The public

If you've read William E. Barrett's widely popular novels, THE LEFT HAND OF GOD *and* SHADOWS OF THE IMAGES *(Doubleday) and his serials in Redbook you won't need to be reminded that he can maintain a truly astonishing narrative pace without sacrificing the kind of characterization that makes his detective yarns so intensely readable. We believe you'll be thrilled by the excitingly human warmth of this unusual story of a brave cop's dilemma.*

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wants to know what you're going to do about those murderous rats, and it's our job to tell 'em."

Corbett knew that this argument would accomplish exactly nothing. But he was an old-timer and he respected precedent and form, knowing full well that chiefs of police liked arguments from reporters. How else could they break dramatically on page one with sage statements and wise observations, Today, however, Costigan was in no mood for speeches. He waved his hand, angrily.

"No sale! A thing's news *when* it happens. What we're going to do ain't news and you know it. It's just a warning to the lads we're after. Wait until we do it, then I'll give you a story."

"Do what?" Garvin of the *News* tried to be adroit.

Chief Costigan snorted and started for the door. "If you'll read tomorrow's papers, son," he said good-naturedly, "you'll find out all about it. Run along now. I'm going to be almighty busy."

There were polite laughs for the chief's feeble sally as the reporters rose to their feet. They knew a stone wall when they saw one, and each was convinced that Michael Costigan was not going to talk this morning.

Of all the crowd, Coy alone held his ground. Coy was young and callow and untried and on the staff of the yellowest rag in town. He thrust his jaw out belligerently, and stood directly in the chief's path.

"You're making a mistake, Costigan," he said hoarsely. "The people of the city have a right to know what you're doing about this case. They demand to know. My paper demands the right to tell them. The police department is working for the public and—"

Costigan extended one ham-like hand and swept the reporter out of his way. At the door he paused and faced the group, his eyes noting with satisfaction that the regular crowd disapproved of the unorthodox stand of the youngster.

"For the sake of the lad that forgot himself and for any of the rest of you that has maybe forgot his book," he said grimly, "I want to get this fact over. The police department may be working for the people, but 'people' is one helluva big word. There's things the public ought to know, and we'll tell 'em." He paused, and his jaw squared aggressively. "Howsomever, there's some things that are none of the public's business. They belong behind the star and they'll stay there. Don't any of you forget it."

He was pounding down the hall on his number twelves before the press group found voice. Garvin struck a match and laugh-

ed feebly. He'd forgotten to put a cigarette in his mouth.

Corbett shrugged and said nothing. But he absently pocketed three of the Chief's cigars before he started for the door.

Coy just stood where he was with his hands in his pockets, a dark frown on his thin face. "The big slob!" he said. "He won't like what I'm going to write about him."

Out in the hall, Corbett, veteran of twelve years in the press room at City Hall, laughed deep in his chest. He had heard young reporters talk like that many times before. But he had yet to see the first of the fire-eating stories that they threatened.

Chief Costigan's face, however, bore no smile as he plodded down the hall to the office of his chief of detectives, Black Bart Doyle. Costigan knew better than anyone could tell him what an unpunished wanton slaying could mean to the force, especially when children were the victims .He was on trial for his official life, and the public was up in arms.

He did not blame the public for that. The part of him that was human apart from the part that was plain cop rebelled at the thought that any breed of thugs would dare to shoot into a crowd of children on the streets of his city.

The Taggart-Turillo gang had done just that. In a long, blue sedan they had streaked to the curb before a tenement house uptown just as two members of the Louis Schmalz gang stepped from a dark hallway.

They had no eyes for the ragged group of children playing on the crowded stoop. With their killers' instincts concentrated on their two gang enemies they had sprayed a leaden hail of death across the sidewalk from the mouth of a Thompson submachine gun.

When they roared away, they left their foes dead behind them. But they also left four huddled, pathetic shapes on the sidewalk that had been happy, playing children. Now a city was crying for vengeance, and the job of exacting retribution was squarely in the hands of Chief Michael Costigan.

Costigan was not taking that responsibility lightly. Within two hours the blue car had been identified, and within four the secret hideaway of the Taggart-Turillo killers was known to the police. Even now the net was tightening. But it was not yet a matter for headlines, and for shrieking newsboys. The shrill yells of those boys would be a warning that could empty the trap before it was sprung, and Costigan felt big enough to stand against the press until his plans reached fruition.

Just outside the door to Black Bart's office, the chief came to

a halt. He could hear angry voices raised in argument. For a moment they vied equally in timber, and then relentlessly the heavy bass of Black Bart Doyle blasted through the competing voice, smothering it, drowning it out.

"I'll have no more of your lip!" Doyle roared. "How a man with your thin guts ever got on the force is beyond me, and how he got out o' uniform and into plain-clothes is a miracle o' the Saints. Ye'll do what I tell you to do, and you'll button your lip and you'll like it when you're doing it."

Chief Costigan smiled faintly and turned the knob. The door opened to his touch and he was in the narrow, smoky office of Black Bart. The chief of detectives was hunched behind his desk with a cold cigar locked in his yellow teeth and a thin drool of tobacco juice running along his chin. At sight of Costigan, he waved to the white-faced plain-clothesman who was standing in a defensive attitude in the middle of the room.

"Get the hell out of here now, and be ready at nine o'clock for orders. I'm goin' to be busy. Better park the yeller stripe some place, too. It'll get you in a lot o' trouble with me if you don't."

The man in plain-clothes stood undecided for a moment with his fists clenched at his side as though he intended to fight the matter out. Then with a doubtful look at Costigan and a clumsy salute, he stumbled from the room.

Costigan let his big bulk slide easily into a chair as the door slammed. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "What's the matter with Darcey? Petering out?"

"Naw!" Black Bart grinned. "Tom's a damned good man. I was just getting him mad so he'd be ready for tonight. He's got a girl and he's a prospect for a wedding license. That kind get careful if you don't burn 'em."

"I see." Costigan's eyes twinkled.

It was good to have men like Black Bart, brutal, rough, inconsiderate and slave driving though the man might be. Bart could be depended upon for results and the world paid off on nothing else from a policeman. Let them be good husbands, good fathers and kind men in private life and the city didn't care. It did demand that they meet emergencies like good cops. And good cops were rough.

They understood all this without any necessity for putting it in words, these two men who faced each other across Doyle's battered desk. Costigan and Doyle had pounded the pavement together and had seen administrations come and go. They were out of the school of the nightstick and billy and had

grown gray in an age of armored and radio-equipped cars and Thompson subs.

Today they were facing a crisis together and they discussed that crisis as men to whom hazard was no new thing. Only when Costigan rose heavily to his feet did a note of sentiment creep into the conversation between them. The chief stuck out his big hand.

"Tonight it is, Bart, and the Saints preserve you. I wish I was goin' along. Look out for yourself."

A crooked smile twisted the rough weather-beaten face of Doyle as he clasped the extended hand in a strong grip. "I always have, Mike," he said bluntly, "and it's a late day for a sneaking baby killer to do what better men couldn't."

Paying no attention to the shrill voices of the newsboys, Tom Darcey was threading his way through the crowds along the narrow street that led past City Hall. If Bart Doyle had lashed him with words to make him mad, he had succeeded beyond his wildest fancy. Of all the epithets in the deck, the one which Tom Darcey was least likely to take now from any man was that short, ugly word "Yellow."

Once he might have taken it, answered with an oath or a fist and forgotten. Real courage is not challenged with a word. A man either has it or he hasn't, and the man who has it is under no need for proving the possession.

Molly O'Ryan had changed all that. When she came into Tom Darcey's life, she had made the unimportant things seem important. With her to win and to make a way for, there must be no questioning of his courage or his manhood. He had become inordinately sensitive on the subject. He had won the love of Molly O'Ryan and that fact made him stand out from other men. A slur directed at him was also a slur reflecting on Molly.

All this was vague in Darcey's own mind, but there was nothing vague about his reaction to Black Bart's tongue lashing. He was awake suddenly to the idea that he hated Black Bart, hated him with his whole heart and soul and had always hated him. The man loomed as a threat to his future happiness, as a barrier between himself and Molly, as a challenge to his manhood.

In such a mood, Darcey paced the hours away; up one street and down the next. He saw neither the people nor the places that he passed. His body grew weary but his mind became more and more inflamed with every hour that passed. Only the iron discipline of the Force and the recognized crisis to be faced that evening, kept him from going

back and having the matter out hand to hand with the detective chief.

Doyle would lick him, thanks to his bulk and the bully heart of him. But Doyle would know that he'd been fighting and he'd swallow his insults—or he'd fight again every day until he did.

A man in love is never quite sane, and there was fever in the veins of Tom Darcey.

The smell of fall was in the air and the shadows fell early. By nine o'clock it was quite dark in the suburb where the Taggart-Turillo gang had established their hideaway. As silent as a legion of ghosts, the police closed in about the weather-beaten stone house that sheltered the gangsters. The tear gas squad followed a thick line of hedge that ran around the north end of the grounds.

Two blocks down the quiet, tree-bordered street an inconspicuous black sedan rolled along at ten miles an hour. There was nothing about this car to betray its police connection and no hint of armor or machine-guns in its appearance. The armor and the guns were there, however. Altogether, the quiet preparations of Black Bart's men were very much like those of an army going into battle.

Black Bart, himself, had elected to go in with two picked men and demand a surrender from the three thugs in the house. He didn't expect to get a surrender, but he did expect to force the gangsters' hands. Once they refused to come out, or took any overt action, the full force of the law would fall on them and there would be hell to pay.

Tom Darcey was one of the two men elected to go in with Black Bart. He drew no significance whatever from the choice nor did it occur to him that there were many other men available, and that no officer taking the chance that Doyle was taking would pick a weak man for his back.

Tom Darcey was simply not capable of perceiving that. He was blinded by the hatred that filled his soul and conscious only of the fact that he had been branded yellow without cause.

Doyle was surveying the house from his post a half block away. Darcey brooded silently with his head down, features sullen. The other member of the trio, Oscar Johnson, was picking his teeth and looking blank. In his nine years on the force, nothing had ever surprised Oscar and he was no more excitable than the bronze figure of justice down at City Hall. People gave Oscar Johnson jobs to do and Oscar did them. When there was no demand for his services, he picked his teeth. Life was that simple.

Doyle was not picking his teeth. Through his outward calm,

there flickered little indicators of inward tension. He looked twice at his wrist-watch within a minute and a quarter and several times he brushed his lips with his sleeve. Finally he turned around. Oscar Johnson wiped his toothpick and put it away. Black Bart grunted and his eyes fell on Tom Darcey.

"You, Darcey! I want you close behind me when I go up. Close behind me, mind you. Hold your ground till I tell you different, and God help you if you flunk."

"I've never flunked yet and you know it!" There was passion in Darcey's voice and it was evident that he had bitten a fighting epithet off as he finished his speech by sheer exertion of will. Black Bart grunted and turned down the block.

A deadly, ominous quiet hung over everything as the three men walked up the block and turned in at the gate of the old house—a quiet that sent a nervous itch over the skins of the hidden watchers. There was something fateful, something inherently dramatic in the sight of those three men walking so steadily towards a house that might be bristling with machine-guns and automatics. Every step that they took forward increased the tension of the watchers. Any moment might bring a whistling burst of death, a withering fire which would wipe the three out in a bat of an eyelid.

Darcey was conscious of that tension himself, but he was more conscious of the fact that he had walked too much that day in shoes that were new. His feet hurt and the hurt took his mind off everything except his hatred for Bart Doyle. The pain increased as he stepped from the cement sidewalk to the gravel path leading to the house. He limped.

Nerves tightened to the point where he was conscious of any slight jarring note in the peaceful rhythm of a suburban evening, Black Bart turned his head with a jerk.

"What in hell's the matter with you, Darcey?"

The query was muffled, hoarse and Darcey answered without conscious thought, "Sore foot."

"Ahhrf!" Black Bart snorted his disgust. "An old gag like that! Well, ye'll stay with us, ye vellow son, whether your foot is sore or not. I'd shoot ye myself before—"

He didn't finish the statement. His super-keen senses warned him of movement behind the windowshade of the ground floor front.

"Up on the porch with ye, quick!" he bellowed.

He gave a dive forward and the two men at his back were no less quick. In two leaps, they had gained the shelter of the

porch. Behind them there was a spurt of flame and an insane clatter. Across the street police .38's were booming and glass was flying from the front windows of the old stone house. Black Bart half crouched on the porch, his breath coming hard.

"Had an idea they'd start things if we gave 'em the chance. They knew they were gone when they saw us and figured they'd fight it out. Bet all the tea in China, they're trying to get out the back way now."

Black Bart bet more than the tea in China. He bet his life on the guess that the gang would take the desperate chance that the back might be unguarded. With two short running steps forward, Bart Doyle crashed his shoulder into the door.

It rattled, but it did not go down. As he rebounded from it, Black Bart growled: "Johnson! Take it."

The Swede never hesitated. His bulk cracked the door within a fraction of a second after his captain spoke. The door swayed crazily and gave. Black Bart kicked it in with his foot and there was a burst of firing from the back of the house. The gang had tried for a break and there were guns out there to tell them, "No."

Darcey had not taken part in the assault on the door because there was no need for him. He was close behind Bart Doyle, however. When the door went down the three plain-clothesmen catapulted into the dark hall.

Doyle snarled, "You, Darcey! Keep close to me. Johnson, drop back a bit. Watch the stairs."

The firing in back had ceased and an ominous hush had fallen over the house once more. For a few seconds there was a break in the silence when a window shattered on the north side of the house. Shortly thereafter the pungent odor of tear gas came faintly from the upper floors. The gas squad was on the job, but where were the Taggart-Turillo trio?

Black Bart was moving slowly down the long, black hall with drawn gun. Darcey walked close behind him. Shaky work this. At any moment the closed door at the end of the hall might open to let desperate, shooting gangsters through. Or a machine-gun might clatter and spray the hallway as a hose sprays a lawn. Under orders, the rest of the police were outside and around the house. They would not come in without good reason.

It was strictly up to Doyle and his men to smoke the quarry out or bring them out.

Darcey was conscious of no nervousness. He marveled at that a little. Usually he was nervous in a melee, or going into one. Tonight he was steady as a rock. The gangsters didn't exist for him. They seemed un-

real—phantoms without substance and without menace. Only Bart Doyle was real. He could picture again Doyle's every sneer and hear again every disparaging, biting, sarcastic word the man had ever spoken. Those things only were real as he crept down the long hall with one hand against the wall and his other tight over the butt of his .38.

They were nearly to the door and Darcey could see Black Bart tighten, crouch and set himself for the assault. Darcey breathed deeply and started a little as glass tinkled again on the north side of the house. The air tortured his lungs and he had a wild desire to cough, a desire with which he battled grimly. A cough would be ruinous now. Damn those tear gas merchants anyway; the house was filling with the stuff!

Suddenly there was a scraping sound at the top of the stairs. Black Bart bent at the knees and turned half way round. Johnson raised his gun with a jerk and the roar of it filled the hall. Almost immediately it was drowned out in a deeper, throatier roar and plaster flew from the walls. Johnson gave a choked cry, rose on his toes and spun slowly around before going down on his face.

"Shotgun! Get the blasted sons!"

Doyle had whirled on his toes and he was past Darcey like a shot. Flame stabbed the darkness as he poured two shots up the stairway and flattened himself against the wall in anticipation of the return.

Darcey took a step forward and stopped. The gas was deep in his lungs and he wanted to cough and his head was spinning. It was all unreal anyway. He raised his gun stiffly, but he lacked the power and the decision to do anything with it. Black Bart was breathing heavily in short, wheezy gasps.

Something moved at the head of the stairway and Darcey tensed. He wanted to shoot but the whole world was swaying dizzily and before he could anchor himself, there was a spurt of flame from beside him, a roaring boom in his ears and a muffled cry from the top of the stairs. A heavy body crashed somewhere above in the darkness. Black Bart cursed.

"Got him! Where in hell are you, Darcey?"

He wasn't waitng for an answer. He was charging the stairs —a cop of the old school whose code admitted of no reservations in favor of the odds. Automatically, Darcey stumbled after him. In a vague way he recognized the fact that he had done nothing, that he was far from a heroic figure and that Black Bart would have some cause for hurling the word yellow at him

again when the night's work was done.

But he wasn't yellow. Something flamed in his blood at the thought of anyone hurling that charge at him. He thought of Molly and of the way in which she would receive any such charge against her man. Molly! Bart Doyle! The names danced in his mind as he charged for the stairs behind his captain.

One couldn't be sure of what a woman would do. Suppose she believed Black Bart? Suppose that Doyle went to her and told her that Tom Darcey was yellow? He could imagine the disgust and loathing on the face of a fine woman who believed something like that of a man she had trusted. It was only one step from the thought to a tormenting imaginary picture of Black Bart actually confronting Molly, gesturing, shouting.

That picture blotted out all thought of the huddled forms of children lying in the street, blotted out the last vestige of reality about the raid. Darcey's head whirled. His hand tightened on the gun as though he could grip it tight enough to prevent himself from pitching forward and lying still as Johnson had done.

Black Bart! He saw the broad shoulders and the thick neck of the man before him on the shaky stairs. The gun felt hard in his grip and the world was revolving in a red mist. There was a buzzing in his ears and he had to squint hard to see the broad back before him. He lifted the gun.

Suddenly there was a roar from the dark landing above. A veritable hail of destruction ripped the stairs and Darcey spun half way round. He was conscious that he was squeezing hard on the trigger and that flame was spurting from the mouth of his gun. Then Black Bart's heavy body was rolling down the stairs and another shotgun load was tearing the wall to pieces a few inches from his head.

Tom Darcey half leaped and half fell down the long flight, rolled over on the floor of the dark hallway and bounded to his feet as guns roared again down the stair. The sagging door was right before him and he leaped for it to escape from the deadly stuff that choked his lungs and made him reel.

Air! He had to have it. It was minutes, seconds, perhaps, since the ruckus started. It seemed weeks and months. Men were running across the lawn towards the house—blue-coated men with drawn guns. Tom Darcey didn't see them. He was pulling air into his lungs, mopping his sleeve across his forehead.

As suddenly as the madness had come upon him, it left. The clean air seemed to drive the hatred from his soul as it drove the gas from his lungs. He was still weak and shaking, but the

gangsters were no longer unreal, the raid no longer phantasy. He knew in a flash of comprehension that he had run away under fire, that Johnson was lying in there—and Black Bart!

Like a flash, Darcey spun on his heel and plunged back through the doorway. And suddenly he was living again in a world of realities, a world where one answered epithets with direct action and where cops had duties to perform. The hatreds and the doubts and the deadly inertia were gone with the gas and Tom Darcey was once more a man with a star that he took pride in.

Two dark forms were plunging down the stairs—shadows in a hallway crowded to the brim with shadow. Darcey saw them coming, felt the gas like a cutting fog. Then sound and flame and fury filled the hall.

The gangsters were shooting as they came, but the lone cop stood his ground. He stood it even when a slug spun him around and numbed his left arm, and he had no thought of crawling away when another slug knocked his left leg from under him and sent him crawling.

Fighting for control over a mad urge to press the trigger wildly and empty the gun which had already spent most of its cartridges, fighting against the gas, and his own weakness, Darcey waited. When the two men were looming grotesquely large above him in the dark, he squeezed the trigger — and squeezed again.

Choked cries mingled with the thud of falling bodies and then there was a stamping clatter of feet upon the porch and the bluecoats were plunging into the hall. Like a groggy, punch-drunk pug who rises from the canvas solely because his instinct wills to carry on, Darcey pushed himself up from a rug that was slowly being saturated with his own blood and that of the men he had shot. Men were reaching for him, shouting at him, but he shook them off.

"Black Bart! He's up there! I . . . I . . . Oh, my God!"

Darcey was plunging forward; crawling, creeping — dragging himself up the stairs. There are stronger instincts, stronger emotions than hatred and Darcey was feeling the strong stuff now. The stairs he made a step at a time while the confused bluecoats below were turning their flashlights on the shambles in the hall, gasping blindly in the gas and cursing their own confusion.

Half-way up the flight, Darcey found what he sought. Black Bart was huddled in a hall across two steps with his hand against one of the posts of the stairs. He had been trying to regain his feet to the last and Darcey had to tug hard with his last vestige of strength to free that iron

grip. When he had accomplished that, he was done. The power drained out of him as he tugged to swing Black Bart's body with his one good arm. Together, the two men plunged down the stairs and rolled over and over to the bottom.

Traffic scattered to the various curbs along the street outside as the police ambulance clanged its way to the old stone house. But neither Darcey nor Black Bart Doyle heard the clamor.

The extras were selling like hot cakes on the streets of the city that night. Shrieking newsboys made change as fast as their fingers could count out the coins. And the big presses roared and thundered while new editions rolled out with details that the earlier editions had missed.

Baby Killers Fight It Out with Cops.
True to Their Boast That They Would
Not Be Taken Alive. . . .

Luridly, sensationally, the yellow press played up the battle. There were hastily made, badly blotted cuts of Chief Costigan and of Black Bart Doyle and big, glorified cuts of the gangsters. The babies were forgotten in the excitement of the minute and the stories throbbed with gang glory and the last stand of three against the Force.

Along the long aisles of the hospital, Chief Michael Costigan walked with heavy tread. There was a grayness in the Chief's face tonight and a tremor in the corner of his hard mouth. To the reporters gathered downstairs he had been bad copy. His "I have nothing to say" had been loaded with curt finality. For once, too, it was fact rather than evasion.

Chief Costigan really did not have anything to say. He felt very old and very tired. He had read the papers and, for the first time in over twenty years, they had hurt him.

"Egging a man on to his death, hounding him and abusing him; then making heroes out of the lousy gutter rats that do him in!"

A somberly garbed Sister glided up to him. Costigan halted awkwardly and made a grab for the hat that wasn't on his head. "Chief Costigan, one of your men is asking for you. It—it seems important. A minute. . . ."

"Yes. Yes. Thank ye, Sister." Gruff, strangely humble, the Chief walked heavily behind the Sister to a narrow white room a few paces down the hall. Mike Costigan didn't want to go to that room but he didn't know how to refuse. He wanted to see Bart Doyle, but when this man asked for him and a Sister came for him, what was there for a man to do?

The white, suffering face of Tom Darcey looked up from the white covers of the enameled bed.

Something like relief, something more like fear lighted in his eyes as the Chief shuffled in. Darcey swallowed hard and, as the Sister glided discreetly from the room, beckoned Costigan closer.

"Chief, they say I'll get well, that I'll be all right. Captain Doyle, they say won't . . . won't . . . They say—"

The Chief brushed his hand across his forehead. He didn't like the smell of hospitals, the small rooms. He didn't like men to gape at him and he didn't want to discuss Bart Doyle with anyone.

Darcey wet his lips. "And, Chief, there were a couple of reporters in here. They were talking about medals, about a purse for me because . . . "

Costigan straightened in his chair and his jaws hardened Had this man called him in here to ask about promotion and pay and medals at a time like this?

The sweat was standing out on Darcey's face. He pawed at the coverlet with one bandaged hand. "Chief, don't let them do that. Don't let them. I couldn't stand it. I think I killed him. I was going to . . . I don't know. I think I shot him."

Costigan sagged in his chair. His eyes widened. Then his hand shot out. He stopped his clutching fingers just as they were about to tighten upon the wounded man's shoulder. His voice came muffled, strangely hoarse.

"What's that you're saying, lad? What in heaven's name—"

Brokenly, incoherently, Tom Darcey gasped out the story. He told of the terrible hatred that had ridden him, the long afternoon and the unreality of the fight in the old house. When he came to that awful blind moment on the stairs when the gas had choked him and the world had swayed as he pressed hard on the trigger of his gun, he faltered. Only the terrible whipping of his will made him carry on. When he was through, he half rose from the bed.

"But it wasn't me, Chief. It wasn't me. I wouldn't shoot him. I didn't really hate him. I don't know what happened. I . . . "

The Chief stopped him with one weary hand. One does not enjoy seeing a man break before one's eyes and Costigan knew hatred. There had been a sergeant once in the old days that he might have killed, but he'd gotten over it and learned to understand it. He rose heavily to his feet.

"Keep your mouth shut about that," he said, "and don't worry about it. A man don't do the things usually, lad, that aren't in his heart to do. I'll drop in on you again."

He was walking out, almost running out, eager to escape from the disclosure that he had just heard. The lines in his face had deepened and there was a haggard look around his eyes. Almost

at a trot, he went down the long corridor.

In another little room, Black Bart was waiting for the last roll call. His face lighted up for a minute when Chief Costigan bent over him. One hand came out and gripped the gnarled finger of the Chief firmly.

"A good show, Mike," he said, "and the way any copper would have it that was half a copper at all. Look in on the Missis and the kids, won't you. Just once in a while, you know . . ."

Half an hour later, Chief Costigan walked again down the long hall past the little white rooms. He had just had a talk with the surgeon and some of the lines were smoothed from his gray face. He stopped at the room where Tom Darcey was resting against the day when Molly would meet him at the hospital door and go with him to the little church . . . if?

Darcey started up as the Chief entered. Costigan waved him down.

"The lad that did for the Captain used a sawed-off shotgun," he said gruffly. "There weren't a bullet in him. Go to sleep, now, lad, and forget that bad dream of yours."

He was outside again with the choked thanks of Darcey and the steady voice of Black Bart still ringing in his ears. A shadow detached itself from the pillar outside the hospital door. Coy, cub reporter of a yellow sheet, had been waiting a long time for this opportunity.

"Chief, I want an exclusive statement for my paper about the raid. I want—"

That was as far as he got. Mike Costigan walked right past him as though he did not exist; he did not, as a matter of fact, so far as the Chief was concerned at that moment. With a curse on his lips, Coy stared at the broad, swinging shoulders.

"The big, over-bearing slob!" he growled. "Too damned big, isn't he? Sitting in an office with the high hat on while other men get shot, then he won't even give a statement about them to the press. The blasted tin horn! Bet he doesn't even do a thing for that cop, Darcey, who did the guttiest thing that this town ever saw."

If his bet had been cash, he'd have won it. Chief Costigan never did a thing for Darcey except return him to duty and send him a wedding present. Coy never understood and he never will. Some things just naturally belong "behind the star."

express to danger

by . . . Mignon G. Eberhart

When the alderman turned a lively shade of green Susan remembered the faces in a speeding El train — and murder in motley attire.

SUSAN DARE pulled her mink cape closer about her throat, adjusted a trembling orchid, and had no idea that she had made a serious mistake. She ought to have accepted the Burry limousine. She ought to have borrowed five dollars and gone to a hotel. She ought to have walked. She ought to have done anything but what she did do.

Around her rose the swift, harsh clatter of the elevated train hurling itself through the lightbound Loop. Along the streets below the dispersing theater crowds had dwindled to a few solitary couples. Fervently active electric signs flashed past in quick staccato, their brilliance moderated at intervals by the steadier glow of neon arc lamps. Then with a slur and a grind of wheels the train jerked to a stop, and the door of the car was pulled raucously back to permit the entrance of other passengers.

Susan stared at them with faint apprehension, wondering how many women would feel at the

We're quite certain that any editor reckless enough to make a list of the world's ten best living detective story writers would instantly find himself engaged in a raging controversy. We're equally certain that any such list would be conspicuously elliptical if it failed to include Mignon G. Eberhart, whose upwards of thirty Susan Dare novels have been translated into a dozen languages. It's a rare privilege to bring you the famous Susan in a high-fidelity crime thriller of "darkest mystery all compounded."

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peak of their poise if obliged by force of circumstance to ride in an elevated train dressed in the height of fashion. There was something innately incompatible between orchids and elevated trains.

Susan had arranged trailing folds of white satin around her slender ankles, and drawn a green velvet wrap tightly about the embarrassing conspicuousness of her low-cut evening dress. But she was quite obviously dressed in a manner that demanded another kind of vehicle. Though she instinctively disliked ostentation, a large and expensive limousine would have suited Susan very well at the moment. She would have been grateful, however, for a taxi. Or, more accurately, taxi fare.

Two other passengers appeared in the doorway, and paused on the threshold of the car to glance swiftly and sharply along its crowded length before they entered. Both were men. Her first impression was that they were together, but she became less sure of that when they walked along the aisle and took separate seats. The first was a thick, short man with a fat, round face, high cheekbones, and cold dark eyes. He sat down across the aisle and a few seats behind Susan, his hat over his eyes, and his overcoat buttoned to his chin. He kept his hands in his pockets. He was like a thousand other men intent on their own affairs.

The second man who entered walked—or rather lurched, for the train had started again—to a seat directly in front of Susan. Because she couldn't help it, she made a mental note of him. He was a very large man, dark, with a heavy, florid face and very quick, pale blue eyes. His coat collar was turned up, too, his hat brim pulled low. The coat was of superlative quality, its tailoring bordering on the elaborate. The brim of his hat was a shade too wide, and the felt too soft and thick. He wore a diamond ring and the five or six carat stone glittered and shone on his thick, swarthy hand as he caught the corner of the seat.

Before he sat down he glanced once at Susan. It was an extremely quick and extraordinarily chilling glance, as if he sought only to satisfy himself with forthright effrontery that she was a young, unaccompanied woman, not bad to look at perhaps, but a little on the slim side, and a little too quiet to be really interesting. Then the chill glance dismissed her. He sank into his seat and presented only a thick pair of shoulders and a broad and muscular-looking neck to Susan's view.

The cool, deliberate survey gave Susan an amused but also a pensive moment. Here she was, an unattended, reasonably young,

and reasonably pretty woman, dressed like everything and riding after midnight in an elevated train—and a man most women would consider menacing did not so much as give her a second look!

She leaned a little against the shining windowpane and could see nothing but lights flashing past and a careening taxi immediately below, hurling itself between the elevated girders as if pursued.

"Randolph and Wabash," called the conductor wearily above the clatter of the opening door. No one moved in the car in which Susan sat, and no one entered until the conductor started to close the door. Then there was a sudden shuffle of footsteps and someone hurled himself into the car. With a loud, grating jar the door swung shut, and the train jerked into motion again.

The newcomer also paused on the threshold, perhaps to catch his breath. Then he came quickly forward and took the seat directly across the aisle from Susan.

She was aware of his entrance but was still looking downward to the street. Immediately below a taxi stood, drawn up to the curb with its door wide open. The driver stood on the sidewalk reversing the meter and staring up at the departing train.

Susan had an instant's impression that this was the taxi which a moment or two before had been careening madly along the street below them. Was it then pursuing, instead of being pursued? Had it been flagged in an emergency so that its passenger could catch the train?

She turned and glanced idly at the man across the aisle. A small tocsin of warning plucked at her nerves.

He was just a man in a brown tweed suit and topcoat, with a folded newspaper protruding out of a pocket that sagged a little. But, from habit, she noted and remembered certain small things—the way his coat clung to his shoulders and suggested the friendliness of much wear, and the quickness with which he moved. She noticed, too, the economy with which he settled himself at once and pulled out and unfolded the newspaper and the fact that his bare hands were unexpectedly fine and well kept. He lifted his face to look at a headline, and the light fell more fully upon it.

It was a good face, intelligent, a little fine-drawn, with lively blue eyes and a mouth that was firm without being firm-lipped. *Hard on the surface,* thought Susan. *Perceptive. Humor without sentimentalism. Sensitive underneath.* Probably she was all wrong in her brief appraisal. The only thing she could be sure of was that he, too, wore his hat pulled low over his eyes. Decidedly it was the fashion.

She looked out the window and returned to her own quiet thoughts.

And the train lurched and clattered and screeched around a curve and stopped again. "Norshore transfer," bawled the conductor.

The platform, unusually long at that station, was immediately outside Susan's window, and ran along parallel and very close to the tracks, so the face of the one waiting woman passenger was brought for an instant directly in front of Susan. It was a brief proximity. But Susan, with the cataloguing instinct of her trade, had an instant's impression of blond hair, eyelashes darkly beaded, a young, painted mouth, and a throat that wasn't so young, partially concealed by a cape of silver fox. The eyes were not so young, either. They met Susan's, and swept on, and Susan's cataloguing instincts were caught up into sharper perception. For assuredly there were two expressions in those hastily glimpsed eyes, old in a young face, staring into the brightly lighted El car. The first was that of recognition and pleasure and it was accompanied by a ready, flashing smile. The second, following immediately, was something completely different — something that swept off the smile as if it had never existed, stiffening and hardening the lines of the small, pretty face.

The car came to a full stop, and the girl turned her fur-clad shoulders and walked down the platform to the door of the car, and out of Susan's ken. Odd, thought Susan, how definitely the second expression, flashing into the face so curiously near her, had suggested fear. And no faint and trivial fear, at that.

There was a swish and tapping of feet along the aisle and a cloud of heavy perfume—gardenia, it was, and tuberose, heavily mingled. The young woman of the silver foxes passed Susan, and sat down promptly across the aisle and in the seat directly ahead, so that she was in front of the man in brown tweeds and directly opposite the man with the thick neck.

They made a curious quartet: the girl in silver fox, with her eyelashes stiffly beaded and her mouth a curving, scarlet line; the man with the thick jaw and thick neck and the great diamond that winked in the light; the young man in brown tweeds across the aisle; and Susan herself—very quiet, a little uneasy, in white satin and mink. With, some seats to the rear, an observer—the first man who had entered the El car.

She turned to glance in his direction, and found that he was actually an observer, for he was watching the woman of the silver foxes intently. Watching, Susan felt suddenly, all of them, his

hands in his pockets and his eyes dark and still.

The young man across the aisle was watching the girl, too; looking at her over the edge of his newspaper. As if he knew her. Certainly there was recognition in his face. His eyes shifted to the big man in front of Susan, and she was suddenly sure that he was not scrutinizing a face he had never seen before. Then he held his newspaper over his eyes. It was odd that he wasn't reading!

It was equally curious that she, herself, was so possessed of a desire to observe her fellow passengers. She turned abruptly to the window again and reminded herself that, after all, there were limits where professional demands ran up against the ordinary observances of society. It was not polite, for instance, to stare at strange people after midnight in an elevated car.

Lucky that, so long as she'd taken the elevated, she'd caught an express. It would eliminate a lot of stopping and starting, as well as time.

Screeching, the train rounded a curve and shot westward. They were out of the Loop now and there were fewer lights, and below them suddenly was the river. Then in a flash they plunged into darker streets. The windows became suddenly black and shining, pierced only occasionally by outside lights. They were like mirrors and reflected the car, its occupants, and each other in two long dark lines, so that there were all at once three cars, one real car and two phantoms riding along through the night above a sleeping city.

"Elwell Street," wailed the conductor, emerging suddenly from the car behind. "Elwell Street. Last stop before Hazard."

No one moved. There was a lurch, a throbbing silence, another lurch, and they were off again, one real and two phantom cars traveling through a black and phantom world. It had become a world Susan didn't know and it was not an inviting one. Quite, thought Susan a little grimly, the contrary.

She leaned close to the window, and peered down upon deserted pavements, empty sidewalks, blank, black buildings. She felt curiously chilled. She hoped the rain that had been threatening all the day would hold off until she reached home, and made a sudden snatch at her small evening bag, which had slipped on her velvet lap.

The little quick gesture had an alarming effect. Everybody looked.

With incredible swiftness the thick shoulders in front of her whirled around, two pale eyes blazed at her from under the low hat brim, fastened on the bag clutched in Susan's paralyzed hand, and then as suddenly re-

treated, and there was again only thick shoulders.

Simultaneously the girl ahead swirled around, her small face rigid in its frame of silver fox, stared briefly at Susan, stared briefly at the bag, stared less briefly at him of the heavy shoulders, and then settled her hat on her very blond head and turned around again.

And in the same fractional moment the man across the aisle slid his hand into his coat pocket and became tensely and guardedly aware of Susan. He had not so much as glanced at her before, a fact in itself surprising.

Impelled by something outside herself Susan turned.

In the back of the car the short man with the dark eyes was just sitting down. And he was watching her fixedly, as if uncertain of his next move. His right hand, too, was in his coat pocket and there was a perceptible bulge as if it held—which was absurd—a weapon.

It was absurd. It had to be absurd. To her knowledge she had never seen him before—or any of those oddly assorted passengers. It was more than absurd; it was fantastic.

She turned sharply away, annoyed at herself for looking. Moments passed, and Susan still sat with her nerves tense, poignantly and unpleasantly conscious of the car and of its passengers. There was, however, no further movement among them.

She looked out the window again and endeavored to soothe her nerves. She lost herself in the dark mystery of the streets below. Anything could happen there. Anything and everything.

Express to Hazard. Clattering, jostling, screaming, lurching past closed switches, it hurled on through a dark world, shattering quiet at it went.

But that night, that particular express did not reach Hazard. And, by stopping as it did, when it did, it changed the course of several lives.

II

Susan Dare didn't know at what street it came to its shocking, unexpected stop, and she had no warning at all that it was about to happen. There was only, suddenly, a rending crash, complete darkness, a series of bumps, a spine-shattering jerk, and they had stopped amid a rain of red sparks from somewhere outside. Vaguely she knew that there was a tumult of shouts and outcries from somewhere ahead and that she'd struck her elbow sharply and there were needles along her wrist.

And then someone gripped her arm and a voice said in her ear: "Don't scream."

Susan didn't scream. She couldn't.

"I'm not crazy," went on the voice. (It must be, she thought swiftly, the man in brown.) "You've got to get out. Now. Quietly."

Inquiries, arguments, comments, flashed through Susan's mind. There was an urgency about the whispered words that overcame them all.

"Very well," she said.

He groped for her hand, grasped it, and there was a grating sound of a door being opened ahead, and the conductor's voice shouting something about the cars having gone off the rails, and lights, and waiting, and was anybody hurt. By the time he had finished Susan realized that they were at the back of the car.

"We've just passed a station," murmured the low voice. "Car was likely derailed on a switch. Now, if we've not got past the platform—" There was a pause, and then he said, "It's all right. All we have to do is walk out. This way—look out for your heels—now through the gate—there you are—"

Susan felt wooden planks under her slippers. A dim light revealed a length of narrow, shadowed platform. Farther down, the station window was outlined in faint light. She turned. "Why—?"

"Don't stop," he said urgently, still in a half-whisper. "Come on." He was propelling her swiftly along the platform around a corner. "Here are the stairs. Look out—"

Susan picked up her white satin skirt, and shot a quick glance at her companion, who, under the dim light at the head of the stairs, proved to be as she'd thought, the man in brown tweed. She started down the stairs.

Halfway down he vouchsafed absently, "Don't worry. I'll get a taxi for you. And I'm much safer than that elevated car was." Something in the words seemed to amuse him. He chuckled a little, and added, "It's safer for you here and certainly safer for Steve Cavan. Come along, my damsel in distress. For God's sake, don't trip!"

They reached the bottom of the stairs and emerged upon an empty street.

"Why?" said Susan tersely.

He looked at her then. "Because the middle car up there is off the track, and will remain so, blocking the way for some time. Because there won't even be lights until they can get help. And because there may be some trouble in that dark car up there, and you look—" He paused and added quite impersonally, "I think you'll be safer in a taxi."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Never mind what," he said abruptly. "Look here—there's a little coffee place across the street. Suppose we go there and

telephone for a taxi. Let's go, and stop worrying."

Susan went docilely.

The small coffee shop was a lunch counter, glistening. The attendant came forward sleepily, and Susan's companion looked at her briefly and said, "You look pretty pale. Don't be scared. You got out in time. And if you have any sneaking notion that you've jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, forget it. I've got a wife and four kids. Besides, this is my busy night . . . Here, Buddy, give this lady a cup of coffee. And where's your telephone?"

"Over there," said the boy. "But it's no good unless you've got a telephone slug. We're out."

Susan slid rather weakly down on one of the stools before the counter. Probably she *was* pale; she felt pale. And she would have to ask the man for taxi fare.

She accepted the hot coffee, and the man in brown searched his pocket and frowned. "No slugs," he said. "Any other telephone near here?"

The boy shook his head. "Everybody else near by is closed."

"Closed. Well—where's the nearest taxi stand?"

"Four blocks over. Halmer Street. Straight down from the El station." The boy paused, g r i n n e d, and added, "Mr. Cavan."

So that was his name, thought Susan, drinking coffee. Steve Cavan. And he was safer out of the black elevated car.

He looked irresolutely at her, walked to the door and looked up at the elevated train, and came back. "I suppose we'll have to get you a taxi," he said. "Do you mind waiting here?"

"I'll go, too," said Susan. "I don't mind the walk. It's awfully good of you to take the trouble—"

"No trouble," he said brusquely. "I can't drag you off the El and turn you loose in this part of town. I'll have some coffee, too."

But he took the cup to the door, and stood looking thoughtfully up toward the elevated line while he drank it. He drank it slowly. So slowly, watching the elevated steps opposite the coffee place between gulps that Susan was nervously tapping her fingers on the table and shooting little glances at the clock by the time he returned to the counter and asked the boy for another cup of coffee. He took that one, too, back to the door, and drank it with the utmost deliberation.

But he was frowning uneasily when at last he came again to the counter. Susan had waited in silence, stifling the questions she wanted to ask. There was an alert look about the ears of the boy who served them. She had not, however, any doubt at all that Steve Cavan, whoever he

was, would eventually simply put her in a taxi and forget about her. And anyway, thought Susan somewhat morosely, she would rather hunt down a taxi with the man beside her than be cooped up in the dark and singularly threatening El car for an indefinite length of time.

She gathered up bag and gloves and rose. Steve Cavan looked at her, started to speak, stopped, and flipped small coins across the counter.

"It's going to rain," said the boy. "You'll have to hurry." Again he added, respectfully, "Mr. Cavan." Again there was an alert and inquisitive look in his face.

The man in brown looked at the boy. "Where's the next Elevated station? Far from here?"

The boy shook his head. "Next street. It's the southwest transfer. Station platform goes right on from this station to the transfer station."

The man in brown was looking startled. "Do you mean anybody could reach the street without coming down the stairs opposite your place?"

"Sure, Mr. Cavan. All they'd have to do is walk a block along the platform and come down on Southwest Street, the next street over."

"Damn," said Mr. Cavan, and meant it. He took Susan's elbow. "Come on," he said.

The door banged behind them, and Susan flinched and blinked in the sudden rising gust of wind and dust.

"Golly," said Steve Cavan. "The boy was right. Rain's about here—well, it won't take us long. We turn here—"

"But this isn't the way the boy said," expostulated Susan feebly, gasping for breath.

"I know. But there's a place I've got to—never mind. I'll see you get a taxi. Am I going too fast?"

"N-no," said Susan, panting.

He took her at her word and walked faster. But even so a sudden vicious swirling of rain caught them in the middle of the second block. Cavan stopped suddenly, hauling Susan to a pause, also. They were on a residence street, lined with narrow, two-flat buildings, for the most part.

Steve Cavan was looking up and down the street. Nothing moved. There was no sound of footsteps—distant or near. There were no lighted windows. Dotting the murk at rather long intervals were street lights, not too bright but sufficient to reveal emptiness.

"Well, I guessed wrong," Steve muttered. Then he continued, with an air of decision, "Look! There's a lighted vestibule, and it looks like the outside door's open. If it is, you can wait there while I try to get the

taxi. Won't take me a moment. Come on—up these—steps—"

A glass-paned door actually did stand ajar, and suddenly they were inside a bare, white-tiled vestibule, out of the rain, and Susan was gasping for breath and shaking rain off her hair.

Steve Cavan looked indecisive. "I guess this is the best we can do. You'll be all right. I—I know who lives here. Nobody—seems to be around. The windows are dark. Anyway, it does not matter, for it won't take two moments to get a taxi." He looked at her thin slippers and her bare, shining head and splashed velvet wrap. "You'd be drenched if you came along. Get your death of cold, dressed like that."

"It's awfully good of you," said Susan, still panting.

"Not at all." He hesitated. "*Will* you be all right here?"

"Q-quite."

"Well, I'll be off then. No sense waiting. Just stand over there in the corner so as to be out of sight from the street. If anybody does come along just tell 'em you're waiting for a taxi. But nobody's likely to now." He stopped, looked at her, and said, as if reassuring himself rather than her, "Oh, I know you'll be all right." And was gone.

Susan stood meekly in the corner. She hoped it wouldn't thunder and she hoped he would not have to wait for a taxi. She comforted herself with the reflection that he didn't look like a man who waits for things, and picked up her white satin skirt. The edges were black and rain-spattered. Item, one new gown ruined. Item, one velvet wrap ruined. Item, one pair slippers —*What was that!*

Somewhere in that bare, white-tiled vestibule was a sound. It was not a pleasant sound.

But the vestibule was empty and bare and white. There were only two doors leading to upper and lower flats, two mailboxes, two speaking tubes, two bells, and Susan Dare frozen in white satin. Nothing else.

She dropped her skirt and moved nearer the speaking tube. That sound—that heart-stopping sound—

It came again. And it was like —dreadfully like the whimper of an animal in pain.

Susan could not bear it. Even after making allowances for the eeriness that any sound mysteriously acquires in its passage through a speaking tube, she still could not bear it. Besides, she liked dogs.

She put her thumb on the bell below the speaking tube and pushed. And simultaneously she noted what she had not seen from her former position behind the door. One of the two inner doors was open, revealing an inch of two of black space. The

two facts were synchronized by the lack of response to the bell. The flat was dark. A dog inside was in agony. No one answered the bell.

Susan smoothed back her hair and quite simply pushed the door farther open. The room beyond was dark except for the lane of light let in from the vestibule. It was the first-floor flat, then. And nothing at all happened.

After a silent moment she groped along the wall at her right, and found a button which lighted an ornate chandelier above. A drawing room was thus disclosed and a confusing number of small tables and fatly upholstered chairs, of cushions and smoking stands and ferns, and newspapers flung open upon a florid divan. But there was no one—and no footsteps coming to answer the bell. There was instead, utter, appalling silence.

It was a perfumed silence. She sniffed, and sniffed again. Quite distinctly above the faint, blended odors of tobacco, leather upholstery, and furniture polish was a sweet, heavy fragrance, as if a gardenia lay somewhere in the crowded room or had been carried through it.

But nothing moved and nothing spoke.

Susan waited, and didn't know what to do. Common sense urged her to retire with expedition, but something stronger than common sense held her there. And then the dog moaned again.

Susan smoothed back her hair again and walked lightly into the room. To one side there was a small door, leading probably into a bedroom or a hall, which was closed. At the end of the room, opposite Susan, there was a wide doorway, an arch, and beyond it a wide path of light fell upon a massive dining table. The dog must be somewhere back there, she told herself, fighting back her alarm.

She reached the doorway. Below the table and beyond the path of light were deep shadows, and the button controlling the light for that room was probably on the opposite side near the kitchen door.

Susan did not permit herself to pause. She turned to make her way around that table, with its deep encircling shadow, turned—and trod on something spongy and soft. With a terrified cry she stumbled and groped blindly into the shadows. Her hands encountered an obstacle, heavy, rough-textured and then she was crouching above a dark, flung huddle upon the floor.

It was not a dog.

It was a man sprawled carelessly and bulkily there in the shadow. Was it he who had moaned?

Something, she told herself wildly, must be done about it. Lights, first. Telephone. What

did one do? Susan got unsteadily to her feet and wavered, and the room rocked around her.

She must have floated around the table, for suddenly there was light in the big, inverted glass bowl above, and she was bending over the body again, although she had little consciousness of having moved. She recognized the man at once. He was big and dark, and he had sat directly before her in the elevated car.

He was dead. And on her white satin skirt, just at the knee, was a reddish, wet smear. She looked at it with complete incredulousness and knelt again. With cold, hypnotically steady fingers which did not seem to belong to her she hunted for and found no throb or flutter of life.

She sat back on her high heels and felt very ill and cold, and thought wildly and swiftly of telephones, doctors, help, and averted her eyes from the man's staring dead gaze, and—his head. *His head.* It must have been a terrific blow. What was there in the room that he could have fallen against with such force?

Just above on the wall was a speaking tube. The tube which eerily, fantastically, had caught what must have been his dying, unconscious whimper and sent it to her ears. She shivered a little. Directly beside the instrument there was a box telephone with the receiver dangling. Had he been telephoning then, and been struck down—

She shuddered convulsively. Struck down, cold-bloodedly murdered!

Murder in that dark and empty flat. Only—it wasn't empty! For just then somewhere in the apartment there was a faint but unmistakable click. As if a window lock had been opened—or the latch of a door.

Her heart began a tumultuous pounding. She thought she could not move, but she must have done so, for all at once she was on her feet. She was running, stumbling on the rugs. She had no recollection of closing the door to the vestibule. *And she certainly hadn't bolted it on the inside!* But now she found it closed and bolted.

Sheer, stark terror seized upon Susan Dare. She flung swift hands upon the slide and bolt, wrenched it free, jerked open the door, and fled through the bare, white vestibule and down wet steps into rain and blackness.

III

Blackness, except that suddenly two lights swept through the slanting rain and a taxi stopped with a spattering of tires on wet pavement and Steve Cavan leaped out. Susan Dare ran toward him.

Somehow she must have made herself intelligible, and she must

have done so briefly and tersely but quite finally. For she was thrust into the taxi and Steve Cavan was running up the steps and there was a kind of hiatus of rain and confusion before he reappeared and got into the taxi.

"Where to, sir?" said the driver.

"Nowhere. Wait a moment." Cavan turned to Susan. "Feel better?" he asked.

"What did you—?" Her eyes widened, and her fingers clawed at his sleeve.

"Oh, he's dead," Cavan's face was grim. "Still warm. Murdered, certainly. Nobody's in the flat. The police will be here in a few moments. I called them. Look here—you'll have to give evidence about finding him."

"Yes—I know," said Susan. "But there was someone else in the flat. There had to be. The front door was bolted, and I didn't bolt it. I didn't even close it."

In the semi-gloom of the taxi he looked at her thoughtfully. "Could it have been the wind?"

"No—the door opens inward," she said, quickly. "And the slide couldn't have moved of its own volition across the bolt."

There was a short silence.

"No, I suppose not," he said at last. "I took time to look at the bolt—a slide on the door casing which can be turned out in order to engage a bolt on the door."

"Yes, I know," said Susan. "Of course, those bolts can be worked from the outside. It's very simple—"

He looked at her sharply, frowned, and then said, "Suppose you tell me exactly what happened—everything."

Susan did so, briefly again.

When she'd finished, her companion lit a cigarette very deliberately before he said, "Do you often do such damn'-fool things?"

"I thought—" began Susan defensively and then, feeling the justice of his inquiry, said, "No."

She could feel him turn to look at her sharply again, and after a moment he offered her, belatedly, his cigarettes. "Have one," he said in a friendlier fashion.

"But who is the man? He was in the elevated train. Did you know he was going to be murdered? Is that why you hurried me out of the car?"

He laughed shortly. "Yes, naturally. Just so you'd willfully stumble upon—"

"Don't," said Susan in anguish. "That is exactly what—"

"Sorry," his voice shed its mockery. "He's Elihu Gowdy." He paused, and looked at her through the dusk as if expecting an answer.

The answer, however, such as it was, came from the taxi driver,

who put a long, cavernous face through the window and said, "Is that true, sir? Gowdy! Murdered?"

"Yes," said Steve Cavan shortly. He turned back to Susan. "Don't you read the newspapers? He's the fellow who was going on trial next week in the policy investigation."

"Yes, I—I remember now. Policy racket? Headlines? Some kind of gambling, wasn't it?"

"I'm surprised you didn't remember him instantly," said Steve Cavan. "I thought all Chicago knew about cleaning out the South Side gambling rooms." He paused an instant, then added: "Anyway, this is the fellow. Now he's murdered. A nice mess."

After a moment Susan said in a small voice, "Who did it?"

Cavan started. *"What?"*

"Who did it?" she repeated.

"Who—My God, how would I know!"

"You knew he was going to be murdered."

He stared at her, his features tightening oddly. "What do you mean, *I* knew he was going to be murdered?"

"You told me you did. On the El. That's why, I suppose, you got me out of the car as quickly as possible."

"Oh, that!" There was relief in Cavan's voice. "No, I didn't know he was going to be murdered. I did know that there has often been a certain amount of—shall I say violence?—in his immediate vicinity. Never Gowdy—I'll say that for him. But he moved in murder circles."

"Violence?"

"Cars sprayed with machine gun bullets. Unsolved stabbings. I don't suppose it would interest you.—"

"It interests me very much," said Susan. "Do go on. It was good of you to remove me from a region of flying bullets."

"Listen, my dear young lady. Wisecracks are all right in their place, but—"

"I'm not wisecracking," said Susan sincerely, and she shivered a little. "I was never more serious in my life. You said it was safer for you, too, to leave the elevated car. But you watched it from the coffee shop. Why? Because of potential murder in Mr. Gowdy's aura or—something else?"

The taxi driver, still hanging his cavernous face in the window, said interestedly, "The dame's stringing you, Mr. Cavan. If I was you I'd hand her over to the police. If you ask me," he added, warming to the thought, "I think she done it."

Cavan pushed his hat on the back of his head, revealing a broad, high forehead. "Listen, Miss—what's your name?"

"Dare. Susan Dare."

"Listen, Miss Dare; I had good reason for getting out and

for getting you out. I'm sorry I had to bring you here, but there was nothing else I could do. I don't know who murdered Gowdy and I didn't know he was going to be murdered and I—" He stopped, looked hard at her, and said thoughtfully, "Susan Dare. Susan Dare. Have you ever been arrested?"

Susan drew herself up to her full, slender height, but no one realized better than she that, at best, she was not imposing. She said icily, "Certainly not!"

Had his impertinence no limit?

He seemed perplexed. "I'll swear I've heard your name. Are you sure you've never been up in the D.A.'s offices for anything?"

"Never."

It didn't satisfy him, but presently he said rather dryly, "Well, then you have a new experience coming to you."

"I don't doubt it," said Susan. "But in the meantime, if you knew Gowdy was going to be murdered—"

"I tell you I didn't know it," he said with an almost belligerent vehemence. "I knew it was Elihu Gowdy and I knew I did not care to be cooped up in that dark Elevated with Elihu Gowdy."

"That's telling her, Mr. Cavan," said the taxi driver in deep sympathy.

It appeared to remind Steve Cavan of certain amenities. He said in a goaded voice, "My name is Steven Cavan."

"They call him 'Even Steven,'" volunteered the taxi driver in an absent-minded way. "On account of the St. Swithin's Day massacre. Or sometimes just 'Steve.' He's—"

"He's what?" asked Susan.

Steve Cavan turned on the taxi driver. "Will you kindly shut up?"

The taxi driver grinned, and withdrew his face reluctantly. "Sure, Mr. Cavan," he said. "But don't let her pull anything. You got to watch these dames. She knows more about this than she's letting on. Look at the blood on her dress."

They both looked. Even in the twilight of the taxi the dark smear on her white satin knee was visible. She said, "I—I suppose it was when I leaned over him to see if his heart was still beating. I thought I ought to make sure—"

"I see," said Steve Cavan in an odd voice."

And Susan said, "Then it wasn't coincidence that you left me at the door of that particular flat?"

"Wait a minute. How'd you get over that hurdle?"

Susan sighed and said patiently, "Gowdy was on the El. You were on the El. We walked in this direction to find a taxi. You left me in that particular vestibule and said you knew the peo-

ple. And Gowdy again was there—"

"Oh. Well, as a matter of fact I thought he might go to that apartment. But when I saw that the windows were dark I decided I was wrong, since he'd had plenty of time to get there from the El. Otherwise I wouldn't have left you at that house. A friend of Gowdy's lives there. Does that make it clearer?"

"Friend?"

"A former alderman, if you must know. Name's Glanger."

"If you'd been a moment later you'd have missed the express train," said Susan thoughtfully.

Again he peered at her in a startled way. "How—?" he said, and stopped.

Susan repressed a desire to say, "Elemental, my dear Watson, Elemental." She said, instead, "I saw your taxi. You were —following Gowdy. Weren't you?"

There was a moment's silence. Then Steve Cavan said abruptly, "Look here, Miss Care—Dare—whatever your name is—and I still think I've heard it before! Look here. You know too much. I—I thought you were all right or I wouldn't have pulled you out of that car. But if you know anything at all about this you'd better tell me right now."

"But I don't know anything about it. I never saw the man before. I—" She stopped, overtaken by a speculative memory. "Where's the alderman?" she inquired thoughtfully.

"Alder—I wish you wouldn't switch around so fast," said Steve Cavan plaintively. "I don't know where he is. He's not in the flat; I do know that."

"The two front door were open," murmured Susan out of deep thought.

He tossed his cigarette out the window, started to speak, stopped, started again: "Why were you on the El tonight?"

Something sober and very intent in his voice wrenched Susan's wandering thoughts from the likewise wandering alderman and back to herself. It would be easy enough to prove her identity and her lack of knowledge of the late Elihu Gowdy's life and habits.

But she had been in the apartment. She had found him, dead. She had, indeed, heard him die. There was a red smear on her skirt. Police were on the way. Jail, lawyers, courts threatened. She would be released, of course. Yet circumstantial evidence has its dangers.

"I had no money," she said. "That is—I'd been at the opera, and when we left I told my friends, who live north, that they need not take me home. I told them I'd taxi out. And then when they'd gone I discovered I had exactly a dime. So I took the El."

He did not look at her and

still spoke very soberly: "Could not you have got money when you reached home?"

"No. I'd forgotten to make a trip to the bank, and there's no money in the house. And Huldah's gone to a wake."

"Huldah?"

"The sum total of my household staff. Except for the dog, who's a liability." Susan was aware that she was nervous, and consequently flippant. She said, "I assure you that I didn't murder Elihu Gowdy."

In the dusk she couldn't read his face.

"What was the opera?"

"*Meistersinger.* With not a single note cut. You know how terribly long it is."

"Who are your friends?"

Susan strove to subdue a rising spark of anger. "Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Burry," she said. "Old, rich, and entirely respectable."

"You'd never seen Gowdy before tonight?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"While you were waiting in the vestibule did you see anyone? Anyone at all?"

"No. No one. And I didn't follow Gowdy into the flat and murder him, if that's what you mean."

"I suppose not," he said with somewhat dubious deliberation. "But there's always self-defense," he said vaguely. "And he—was not a nice man."

Susan gasped, and Cavan said, "Here are the police." And red and green headlights made eerie, increasing lanes through rain, and the police were there.

"You'll have to go inside," said Steve Cavan. "I'm sorry. But we'll put something over the body."

The taxi driver put his face in the window again. "I better stay around, hadn't I, Mr. Cavan?"

"I guess so," said Cavan, and helped Susan out of the taxi.

The police cars drew up, stopped. The warm hand at Susan's elbow released her for a moment while Cavan went to speak to one of the burly, raincoated figures emerging into the lights streaming from taxi and police cars.

After a moment he returned. "We'll go into the house now," he said.

IV

As they crossed the strip of wet sidewalk with the white, bare vestibule ahead, the touch of his hand on Susan's arm was warm and oddly sustaining.

"He's in the dining-room," said Steve over his shoulder.

The dining-room seemed smaller, crowded really, with all those people in it. Shining mackintoshes that, shed, revealed blue uniforms and vast chests and, in the case of Sergeant

O'Keefe, a vaster stomach. Steve Cavan with his hat off, so one saw a good, broad forehead, brown, straight-nosed face, and guarded but observant blue eyes. Herself, Susan Dare, pale and frightened, in — fantastically — white satin and mink. All of them standing there viewing that dark, sprawled body.

"He's dead, all right," said the sergeant presently, rising from a cursory examination of the body. "Not been dead long, either. Elihu Gowdy. Well. Trial to come up next week, too."

"A lady's been here," said one of the policemen. "Will you look at this, now?" He held up a fading orchid.

Susan caught her breath, and looked down at her shoulder. Where two orchids had been, only one remained. Cavan's eyes narrowed and he laughed a bit loudly.

"Easy, McCabe. Sure, a lady's been here. Miss Dare, who found him. That's her orchid. But Gowdy wasn't alone, Sergeant. Shorty Shrodt and Elsa Kausca were on the El train, too."

"Elsa, huh?"

"I don't know where they are now. I'll tell you everything I know. But Shorty and Elsa may be somewhere in the neighborhood still."

"Search the house, boys," said the sergeant. "McCabe, phone the station. Tell 'em to pick up Shorty and Elsa. If they don't know 'em by sight, tell 'em to get anybody on the street. Get the squad cars looking for 'em. I'll talk to headquarters later . . . All right now, Steve. What about it?" The sergeant's bright, shrewd eyes swerved from Steve Cavan to glance at Susan briefly and coldly. He knew Cavan. He called him "Steve."

"My story?" said Steve Cavan, and grinned faintly. "Here, Susie," he said to Susan indicating an armchair, "sit down. Want to hear all about it now, Sergeant? . . . Okay. The elevated car went off the track—"

Susan sat down. It was evident that she was, provisionally at least, sponsored.

Steve Cavan was terse, using clipped, telling phrases. Susan heard herself accounted for and her motive for entering the flat made less imprudent and impulsive than in the sober light of second thought it actually was.

Gradually, however, a kind of mask descended upon the sergeant's face. "And you saw no one while you were in the flat?" he asked her directly when Steve Cavan had finished.

"No one," said Susan.

"And Gowdy didn't say a word? Just moaned?"

"Just moaned," said Susan steadily. "And—died."

He looked at the small red stain on her white satin skirt, and Susan found herself explaining it.

"I kneeled over him to see if there was anything I could do. But—there wasn't anything."

The sergeant nodded but his face did not move.

Steve Cavan spoke crisply: "There's a small hall running parallel with this room and connecting the back part of the house with the front—the entrance to it is in the sitting-room just back of the door from the vestibule."

The sergeant turned, looked, saw the door to the small hall and nodded. "Could anyone have come from that hall and closed and bolted the front door without your knowing it?" he asked. "Just what do you think, Miss Dare?"

Susan, feeling cold and frightened and lost in the huge armchair, replied. "I think," she said in a small voice, "that the blow was struck shortly before I took shelter in the vestibule. I think that some time after that—the medical examiner will know about how long—the victim became semi-conscious and moaned several times before he died. I think that when I entered the flat the murderer—" Susan smoothed back her browr hair—"was still here.

"He was possibly just about to leave by the front door, when he heard our voices, and perhaps our conversation. When I entered the flat he was hidden, waiting for a chance to escape. When I went into the dining-room he took the chance, and also the opportunity that presented itself to throw suspicion upon an innocent person. That is—me," said Susan painstakingly.

"I think he bolted the door from the outside. I believe I am correct in thinking that can readily be done. And then he made his escape, leaving me to be discovered, locked in the flat with a murdered man. I think, in all probability," went on Susan, taking a gentle breath, "the windows and the back door will be found locked also. I was kneeling there, by the body. It would have taken a little time and care, even for someone who knew exactly how to do it, to work the bolt just like that. Three minutes, at least.

"However, I was naturally very much shocked and alarmed. My impression of time may not be quite accurate. It may have been longer or shorter than it seemed. From my position I could see only a small portion of the sitting-room. The murderer could have counted on that, and on a natural confusion on my part. Also, he could have escaped instantly if I had moved, so the extra time for working the bolt was not dangerous and might have been extremely valuable to him. If someone had come to the door, found it locked on the inside, and me alone with—"

Susan paused to take breath, and glanced toward the dark outline on the floor. She finished, "—with him," rather feebly, and looked at the sergeant and Steve Cavan.

Both men were standing very straight and rigid. Steve Cavan had no expression at all but the sergeant seemed a bit shaken. He cleared his throat gustily.

"Well, of course," he said, "the bolt could have been worked that way. It's an old stunt. But do you happen to know, too," he continued, rallying, but with only the faintest touch of iron, "just how Gowdy got here?"

"I think," said Susan in a small voice, "that he left the elevated car very shortly after we left it and probably the same way. But we stopped for coffee and he came on. I should think it not unlikely that he knew the —the alderman—and that this apartment was his destination.

"Shorty Shrodt," she speculated painstakingly, "or the girl in silver fox may have been with him. At least—" She paused and sniffed. The scent of gardenia had almost, if not quite, dissipated itself. "At least, I'm fairly sure the girl had been here just before I came, You've noted of course, that he may have been telephoning when he was murdered. By a blow from behind."

There was a brief silence and a look about the sergeant that suggested that he, himself, had had some kind of blow.

Steve Cavan said, "Did you see her? Elsa Kausca, I mean?"

"No. I saw no one."

"Then how—?"

"Perfume," said Susan. "Gardenia. Tuberose," she explained briefly. "And I think," she added slowly, "that she was badly frightened, just before she got on the El. Perhaps when she saw—" She stopped and said, "Who is Elsa?"

There was an instant's pause. The sergeant glanced at Steve Cavan, who said: "Elsa Kausca. She was the star witness against Gowdy in the trial. She has been one of his immediate circle for some time." His eyes flickered toward the sergeant. He added, "That's not in the newspapers, yet, Sergeant. She's been out on bond. There was a ruckus about that, but her lawyer won." He switched back to Susan: "Whom was she afraid of? Gowdy?"

"I don't know," said Susan slowly. Suddenly she wondered —who was Steve Cavan, and how did he know so much? And why was he following Gowdy? His presence, his interest in the case were acknowledged instantly by the police. Why?

The sergeant interrupted. He was f r o w n i n g suspiciously. "Young lady," he said heavily, "it seems to me you know too much about this crime."

Susan perceived that she had been tactless. She smoothed back her hair and looked frail and small and weary. "I was terribly frightened," she said truthfully.

Dressed up, Susan had a faintly romantic look, almost certainly due to her dressmaker. She had, also, a certain self-reliance. Yet it was one of her crosses in life to be the recipient of advice from all and sundry, to which it was her custom to listen gravely and not ungratefully, and think her own thoughts.

The sergeant's brow cleared a little. He was apparently moved by an obscure but kindly impulse, though his bright eyes remained watchful and cold. "Of course you were scared," he said heartily. "Now then, Miss Dare, you just sit here till we get some of this routine over with and then maybe we can send you home."

"Oh, never mind me," said Susan in some alarm. "I was just going to say—"

"Well?" encouraged the sergeant.

"The alderman, you know," said Susan vaguely. "Somebody had to let Gowdy into the flat. And the alderman's wife—or whatever family he has—isn't here. And the two front doors were open—" She stopped.

The sergeant looked as if he might be about to pat her smooth, gleaming hair — even though handcuffs reposed, waiting, in his pocket. Steve Cavan, however, was regarding her with inscrutable eyes.

Sergeant O'Keefe turned to Cavan. "Maybe the alderman did it," he suggested, rather hopefully, Susan thought. "He was an old side-kick of Gowdy's, wasn't he?"

"Gowdy knew everybody," Steve said trenchantly. "And the alderman's certainly not in the flat. Somebody had to let Gowdy in." He looked at Susan. "Why do you think the alderman's wife's gone?"

"Dust," said Susan gently. "And the place hasn't been aired. Yet all this"—she glanced about the laden room—"was assembled by a passionate housekeeper."

A policeman emerged bulkily from the kitchen and crossed the dining-room. "We been all over the house, Sergeant," he said. "And there's nobody. No maid —no service quarters. Looks like the womenfolks are gone. There's some dishes piled up in the kitchen sink. And a big cake in a box. And one bedroom is sort of upset and the other two nice and tidy."

"Murphy," said the sergeant somewhat tensely, "is the back door locked?"

"Locked and bolted, Sergeant," said the policeman.

"I wonder," murmured Susan perplexedly, "where the alder-

man went. And why he went so hurriedly."

The sergeant rose, with a suggestion of irritation. "I'll talk to headquarters now. And take another look at the body." He glanced at Susan, hesitated, and melted. "You needn't watch, Miss Dare. It's not a nice sight for young ladies."

"Thank you, Sergeant," said Susan.

The sergeant smiled and Susan smiled, and Steve Cavan wheeled abruptly and walked into the dining-room.

The sergeant's smile, however, vanished as, after a brief but pungent telephone call, he went swiftly and efficiently about his work. Susan watched—with interest and growing admiration.

The admiration increased when, in response to the terse telephone conversation, other men began to arrive, groups of them, nonchalant, easy, keen. Doing what they had to do with economy and dispatch and yet with inconceivable exactness. Occasionally someone glanced at Susan without much interest, and once she was asked to move by a photographer who was taking flashlight pictures of the room. They took fingerprints, too.

It gave Susan an added qualm to surrender her own small fingers to a policeman, an inked, pad, and a numbered card.

Presently the doctor arrived, looked, probed, and finally turned the body over. Once he looked up at Steve Cavan. "Who killed him, Steve?" he said.

"I don't know," said Steve Cavan rather grimly. "I didn't." It was not said facetiously, but the doctor laughed.

And Susan looked thoughtfully at Steve's alert brown face. He had an alibi—or had he? He had left her in the vestibule while he went in search of a taxi. But where had he found a taxi? Gowdy might have been in the back of the house, where lighted windows couldn't be seen from the street. Could Steve have entered the flat in some manner, committed the murder, escaped by the front door while she was actually in the flat, and yet met her in front with the taxi when she fled in terror? No, it didn't leave time enough. Unless the taxi had been encountered within a half-block or so of the apartment.

Where was the taxi driver? She rose quietly. He was not in the living-room or vestibule but was still in his cab, lounging with his feet over the door, watching. Two policemen were outside but ignored her. The taxi driver saw the motion of her hand, unhooked his feet, and crawled out of the taxi and came toward her. "Want me, lady?"

"Yes, where were you when Mr. Cavan hailed you?"

"Corner of Locust and Harwood. Cruising."

"Where is that? I mean how far from here?"

He turned and pointed a long finger toward the nearest street light. "Right there it is. Locust and Harwood. Half a block away. Anything else?"

"Where—?" She hesitated, trying to put it cautiously. "Mr. Cavan hailed you from the sidewalk, I suppose. Or from here—"

"Here?" He peered at her and grinned, so his cavernous face had long, deep wrinkles. "No. He was coming along the sidewalk from the other way. Listen, lady. Don't get any wrong ideas about Steve Cavan. Don't you know who he is?"

"No," said Susan simply and truthfully.

It was unfortunate, she felt, that just then, apparently, she was missed inside and a policeman came to summon her back to the dining-room.

She was in time to hear the doctor's decision. Gowdy's skull had been fractured; he'd have to do a P.M. *What's a P.M.?* thought Susan. *Oh, yes, post-mortem.* No, the doctor didn't know what weapon was used. Something heavy, naturally, with probably a sharp edge. He bustled away at last, and a stretcher and white-clad bearers carried away all that was mortal of Elihu Gowdy.

Much talk followed, and gradually certain facts emerged. Someone had roused the people in the upper flat, but they'd been asleep, with the doors securely bolted, and knew nothing of the murder. The telephone operator knew nothing of a recent, interrupted call from the Glanger telephone. There was no weapon. Gowdy hadn't been robbed of his money. But Steve Cavan recalled that he had worn a diamond ring and a watch on the El, and both were gone.

"Maybe the murderer didn't have time to search him," suggested McCabe. "Maybe he did not know he had money."

"If the motive's robbery," said Sergeant O'Keefe, "then it wasn't the alderman."

And the missing alderman developed as a *leitmotiv.* They were agreed that he had been there, for it was a late edition of that night's paper that lay open on the divan.

"And the two front doors were left open," observed Susan, but no one heard her, and indeed, as a principal suspect, she'd no business to speak at all.

V

The telephone rang two or three times. The gist of the resultant conversations seemed to be to the effect that up to then neither Elsa nor Shrodt had been found.

Once Susan ventured another question. "Who is Shrodt?" she

asked Steve Cavan, during a lull while the sergeant went to question the tenants of the upper floor.

"Shrodt?" he replied shortly. "Gowdy's bodyguard."

"Bodyguard? Then he surely accompanied Gowdy from the Elevated here."

Steve Cavan shrugged. "Gowdy never stirred without him. Nobody in Chicago is quicker with a gun than Shorty Shrodt."

"He wasn't quick enough this time," said Susan somberly. "I wonder. They've searched the apartment, of course?"

Steve Cavan was watching her coolly, and a little guardedly. "No my pet," he said. "There's no other body. Curb the hopeful gleam in your eye."

"Cavan," said somebody across the room, and he turned away.

And Susan rose very quietly and moved across the room, pausing to look at a laden mantelpiece. Her glance lingered thoughtfully upon one of two large brass candlesticks. Then, finding herself unobserved, or at least undeterred, she strolled quietly into the narrow hall which led toward the back of the house.

It was not a large flat and it did not take long to explore it. She lingered a little over the absent Mrs. Glanger's dressing table, which was very full, and the closet, which was almost empty. Certain scratches on the bedroom doors caught and held Susan's attention, and her entrance into the kitchen surprised two policemen.

"The alderman did it," one was saying. "Bet you anything you say. It's his house, ain't it? And what's happened to him?"

"Maybe he's murdered, too," suggested the other somewhat morosely.

"That's a thought," reflected Susan, and entered.

Both policemen whirled rather quickly.

"May I get a drink of water?" asked Susan.

They looked at her, dropped their hands from black leather holsters, and indicated that she might.

The back door was securely bolted. On a shelf at one side there was a box, delivered apparently from a confectioner's. She paused, opened it, and glanced at a cake, iced thickly in white, with "Congratulations" written on it in pink. She noted the name of the confectioner, and touched the icing with an exploring forefinger. It was fresh; it must have been delivered that day, late.

The policemen had followed her movements with watchful eyes.

She licked the sugar from her forefinger thoughtfully, and one said to the other, "I don't see why not?"

"Me, either," the second po-

liceman responded instantly. "There ought to be a knife in a drawer somewhere."

"You better cut it, miss," said the first policeman doubtfully.

Susan assented. One policeman found a knife and the other produced milk from the refrigerator, and glasses. They munched and drank in sober silence. Susan surveyed a laden and disorderly table and sink. There was a bowl half full of milk below it.

"Have you," said Susan, finishing her own milk, "seen anything?"

"Not a soul," said one.

"Nobody," said the other, swallowing cake.

"Not *anything?*" insisted Susan, making a vague, floating gesture.

There was a short and rather shocked silence. Then one of the policemen said, "No, *ma'am,*" very emphatically.

Susan frowned perplexedly and put down her empty glass. "But there ought to be—" She checked herself and went back to the dining-room.

Events, she saw at once, had occurred. Elsa Kausca—blond hair, beaded eyelashes, silver foxes, and all—stood beside the big dining table. And the bodyguard, Shorty Shrodt, dark eyes fixed in a pasty face, stood near her, twisting his hands and staring at the sergeant.

They had been found, then.

They had both obviously been in the rain. The girl's smart hat was spotted and she kept fluffing up dampened points of fur with solicitous hands. Shrodt's hat and topcoat were damp; his shoes, recently and brightly shined, showed rain spots. Susan's glance lingered upon a wrongly threaded shoelace with the end gone, which, in the lexicon of her profession, indicated haste.

Haste. There had been haste, too, in the manner of the alderman's departure.

Susan stood quietly in the lee of Steve Cavan's broad, tweed-clad shoulder and looked and listened. And the fragrance of gardenia and tuberose, synthetically strong and powerful, suffused the room.

Elsa was talking. Shorty Shrodt watched the sergeant, twisted his hands, looked now and then at the floor where Gowdy had lain, and listened.

"I didn't see the alderman," she was saying. "Glanger—I didn't see him at all. I don't know anything about it. I don't know who killed him. You can't hold me for anything. I'll get my lawyer."

Sergeant O'Keefe, eyes very bright and cold, said, "Take it easy now, Miss Kausca. Take it easy. Now then, you were on the Elevated train tonight?"

"Yes," she said, "that's what I told you. I taxied from—from home to the Elevated and took

a train west. What of it? Is there anything criminal about It?"

"That," said Sergeant O'Keefe unexpectedly, "remains to be seen. You saw Gowdy on the Elevated?"

"How could you miss him," she said, "and his diamond?"

Shorty Shrodt stirred, and looked once at her. She bit her heavily painted, scarlet lip, and went on quickly, as if aware of some remonstrance in Shorty Shrodt's eyes: "Of course, I saw Gowdy. But I don't know who murdered him. *I* didn't."

"Nobody said you did. Why did you take that particular train?"

Her bright eyes wavered. She said, however, promptly and pertly, "Because it happened to come along. That's all."

There was a little silence, then Sergeant O'Keefe said easily, "How long has it been since you've ridden the Elevated?"

Shrodt blinked and got out his handkerchief. He said, "It's nothing to you when or where she rides the Elevated."

"Except," said O'Keefe with ponderous and mendacious gallantry, "she looks as if she were more accustomed to limousines."

Miss Kausca bridled, cast a glance downward at the enormous and lavish silver fox wrap she wore, and touched her hat. Shrodt looked indecisively at his handkerchief, as if wondering why he'd got it out of his pocket, and then applied it briefly to his eyes.

She said, "Well, what's it to you where I ride?"

Sergeant O'Keefe thought, and bridged a vast gulf: "Was your appointment with Gowdy or with the alderman?"

Her eyes flashed from her silver fox cape back to Sergeant O'Keefe's broad face. She didn't reply for a second or two; then she said, "What appointment?"

O'Keefe frowned impatiently.

"Now, see here, Miss Kausca, I'm trying to be nice with you. Well, you treat me right, too, see? I know you had an appointment of some kind — with Gowdy or with the alderman. You got the same Elevated train that Gowdy and Shrodt took. The squad car picked you up in a drugstore, waiting for a taxi six or seven blocks away from the El station here."

She said quickly, "The El car went off the track. We waited— I mean I waited. Finally I—I left. And went to a drugstore to call a taxi. I was waiting for it —that's right. But you've got no right to take a lady and haul her out of a drugstore like that. I'll have my lawyer—"

"Why didn't you go to the drugstore on the same street as the Elevated? There was one just below the station where the car went off the track. Why'd you walk seven blocks through the rain?"

She shrugged. "Because I wanted to."

O'Keefe leaned great pink fists on the table and thrust his face toward her. "Do you know what perjury is?"

"I—certainly, I do. I'm telling you the truth."

"All right. Listen. Every word you're saying is being taken down. You'll have to swear to it later. When the D.A.—"

She said sharply but uneasily, "I know the D.A. You can't scare me that way. He—I'm his witness—" She stopped there.

Steve Cavan said, "You won't be his witness now, Miss Kausca. Not, at least, against Gowdy."

She looked from the sergeant to Steve Cavan. Her small face seemed to tighten. She said slowly, "Oh, it's you. I remember you. I suppose you were following Eli. I saw you on the El. I told him you were there—" She caught herself.

Steve Cavan said, "When? When did you tell him that? When you came here with him?"

But she shrank back, eyes going from Steve Cavan to the sergeant. "No! No, I tell you! I didn't come here!"

Shrodt said heavily, "She left the Elevated before we left it, Gowdy and me. She wasn't with us when we left the car and came here."

The girl flashed him an enigmatic look which was not quite gratitude. But she said quickly, "Yes, Yes, that's right. I left the Elevated and—and just walked. I never saw Eli—I mean Gowdy—again."

There was a short silence, while Shrodt restored his handkerchief to his pocket and the girl stared defiantly at the sergeant.

Then Steve Cavan said, "What's that perfume you're wearing, Miss Kausca?"

It took her by surprise. She blinked, clutched her handbag a little tighter, and said faintly, " 'Fair Flowers.' Why?"

Steve Cavan said to the sergeant, "Murphy might see if Mrs. Glanger used it."

"Mrs. Glanger does not use it," Susan put in. "I looked. Just now."

They had forgotten her. Steve Cavan whirled in a rather startled way and his mouth tightened.

The sergeant said heavily, "Oh. Well." He turned upon Shrodt. "Now then, what about you? You're his bodyguard. What happened? Who killed him?"

"I don't know," said Shrodt. "I—I suppose I'd better tell you just what—" He stopped, cleared his throat, and said, "It's been a shock. I've worked for him a long time."

"You've had worse shocks, I imagine," said Steve Cavan shortly. "We'll take your grief

for granted, Shorty. Get to your story."

Shrodt accepted it without a change of expression. He said, "No reporters here?"

"Not yet," said Sergeant O'Keefe. "Why did you come out here tonight?"

"Well, that's what I don't know," said Shorty. "He — Gowdy—he says to me, tonight about nine, 'We're going out to see Glanger tonight, Shorty. We'll go on the Elevated, and I don't want anybody to know where we've gone. Or,' he adds, looking at me hard, 'why.' "

"Why was it?" demanded O'Keefe.

Shorty spread out white, well-manicured hands. "I don't know why. He didn't say. I suppose he and the alderman had some business they didn't want anybody to know about. They didn't even want the chauffeur to know. That's why, I suppose, we came by Elevated."

"He'd better have stuck with his armored car," said Steve Cavan. "Did he have an appointment with Miss Kausca?"

"No. Not that I know of. They didn't speak when she got on the El."

"Were you, yourself, expecting her?"

"No."

"When she got on the El and came into the same car where you and Gowdy were riding, didn't you think it was queer?"

"No, I—well, I did think maybe they was going to have a talk. At the alderman's."

"Bargain?" said Steve Cavan.

Elsa Kausca cried, "Sergeant, he ain't got a right to question like that. He thinks he's a big shot, but he's just an errand boy for the D.A. Shorty'll answer any questions you ask, Sergeant, but Steve Cavan ain't got a right—"

"Shut up," said Shrodt coolly. "I'll answer anything Mr. Cavan wants to ask."

Sergeant O'Keefe said, with the ease of authority, "Go right ahead, Steve. Ask 'em anything you want to ask. And," he added, still easily, "they'll answer. The both of them. Or I'll know why."

"And did you strike a bargain, Miss Kausca?" said Steve Cavan. "Did you?"

Shorty said quickly, "She was not here, I tell you."

Steve Cavan didn't look at Shrodt. "What about it, Miss Kausca? What'd Gowdy offer you to turn against the State?"

The girl pouted, pushing out scarlet lips but watching Cavan intently.

He went on after a moment, "Come on, now, Miss Kausca. Gowdy's dead. He can't hurt you. What'd he offer you? You couldn't have got away, you know. You couldn't have gone fifty miles out of town before you were brought back. Why

did you come out here to see him?"

After a moment she said sulkily that she hadn't. "I was going out to Lake Charles. The quickest way is by El. I've got a sister lives out there."

"You didn't know Gowdy was going to be on the El?"

"No."

"You'll swear you did not meet him by appointment?"

"Yes," she said sulkily.

"So," said Steve Cavan, his voice suddenly edged and fine, "it was altogether coincidence—your meeting him and Shorty on the Elevated?"

"Yes," she said defiantly, watching him.

Sergeant O'Keefe said, "What is your sister's name?"

She hesitated, and said, "Barbatelli. Tony Barbatelli's her husband."

"Murphy — telephone out there and see if her sister's expecting her."

"Yes, sir."

Murphy went to the telephone which a short time ago Susan had seen them examining for fingerprints. She wondered what time it was. No one spoke while Murphy tried to get the number Elsa reluctantly gave him.

VI

Steve Cavan wore a wrist watch. As he took and lighted a cigarette Susan peered at the watch. It was nearly two o'clock. The missing alderman ought to be returning. If Susan's own theory were correct, he ought to have returned, indeed, some time ago. She thought of her theory, perplexed, seeking flaws. But the chain of reasoning was too short and too simple to provide for flaws. The other alternative was that the theory itself was wrong. Which was not, Susan had to admit, impossible.

But there was that dish of milk in the kitchen. And the cake. She sought through her memory for any stray item about former Alderman Glanger, and found nothing. He had been an alderman, useful perhaps to Gowdy; put in his place possibly by Gowdy. Well, then he was no longer an alderman. And Gowdy had certainly come to see him. But why?

The apartment was not in a fashionable or even a good neighborhood. Still, there were obvious traces of money. Glanger and his wife certainly lived comfortably. Then there was, still, an income.

Murphy shouted into the telephone, "Mrs. Barbatelli. Mrs. Barba— . . . Well, never mind who I am. What I want to know is, was you expecting your sister? . . . Yes, tonight . . . Never mind whether it's my business or not. Never— . . . What's that? . . . It's the police, that's what . . . Your sister, sure; Elsa Kausca.

Was you expecting her? . . . Oh. Sure—" Something clicked loudly in the receiver. He jerked it away from his ear, shouted into the telephone, "Hello, hello!" and turned an empurpled face toward O'Keefe. "She says, yes. If her sister says so."

"All right, Murphy."

"I told you—"

"That'll do, Miss Kausca . . . Shorty, you were on the El with Gowdy and you were on your way to Glanger's place here, but you didn't know why. And the car went off the track and the lights went out. What did you do then?"

"I told you."

"Well, tell it again."

"There's no more to tell. We sat there a while, and then Gowdy got up and came back to where I was and said, 'Let's get out of here.' We did, and there was the platform so we could reach it, and steps. We came down, and I started to get a taxi, but Gowdy said we'd walk. So we did. He acted like he was in a hurry. But when we got here he told me to wait outside till he called me. I thought it was queer, but it wasn't my business to question. Maybe he didn't want me to hear what they was talking about. Beside, nobody knew he was to be here, so there wasn't much chance of anybody taking a shot at him. Or so I thought—"

"Wait. Whom do you mean by anybody?" asked Steve Cavan.

Shorty shrugged his shoulders. "Oh," he said vaguely, "just anybody. Nobody in particular. A man in Gowdy's position's got to be careful."

"Go on."

"Well, that's all. He went in the house and I—I waited a while. It started to rain. And he came out and told me to go somewhere and wait. He said I was getting wet and he wouldn't need me. He said to come back in an hour or so."

"*Gowdy* said that!" said Steve Cavan.

"Yes. Yes, he did. I went. I walked down the street, and it was raining and I—stopped in a doorway somewhere over on Lane Street and waited."

There was a pause. Then O'Keefe said, "Too bad you did not go into a drugstore or a luncheon somewhere, Shorty."

"But I did! That's where I was when the police car picked me up."

"How long were you in the lunchroom?"

Shrodt's well-tended hands twisted. "I don't know. I didn't notice the time."

"Didn't notice! You said Gowdy'd told you to come back in an hour."

"I know—and I was thinking it was about time to go back. I'd been there quite a while."

Sergeant O'Keefe looked at a policeman in a still-wet and

gleaming mackintosh, who stood in the doorway. "Get hold of the lunchroom fellow—find out how long Shrodt was there."

"Yes, Sergeant." The cop turned, tall and alert, and crossed the living-room and disappeared in the vestibule.

Sergeant O'Keefe said, "Now, Shorty—who was here waiting for Gowdy?"

"I don't know. The alderman, I suppose."

"Anybody else?"

"I don't know."

"See anybody at all except Gowdy?"

"Nobody. That's the truth, Sergeant. I don't know who killed him."

"You didn't see Miss Kausca?"

"No. Not after we left the Elevated."

"She didn't come with you?"

Shorty Shrodt's eyes were fixed upon the sergeant. "No. I told you that."

"While you were waiting outside the apartment house, did you see her?"

"No."

"Shrodt—" Sergeant O'Keefe leaned across the table again, his red face threatening. "Shrodt, where's Glanger?"

Shrodt drew back and blinked. "I don't know. I didn't see him. I don't know."

After a moment the sergeant turned again to the girl. "Why did you come here?" he said. "You intended to meet Gowdy here. Why?"

Again he drew a complete, blank denial. "I did not," said the girl. "You can't prove that."

Susan had to speak; she touched Steve Cavan's arm lightly and, as he turned to look down at her, she murmured, "There's a cake. Just arrived—a big cake with 'Congratulations' written on it in pink."

He looked puzzled and interested. "What about it?"

"I don't know," said Susan. "It's a very festive cake."

"I still don't see," he began, but Sergeant O'Keefe's big voice boomed out.

"All right," he said, addressing Shrodt and the girl. "If you won't talk to me you won't. So you're going to get a chance to talk to the captain. Take 'em to the station, McCabe. I'll follow you. Leave Murphy here to wait for the alderman. Tell Murphy when he comes to bring him to the station."

The girl said sulkily, "I won't go to the station. You can't make me."

Shrodt looked at her. "Yes, you will," he said. "Don't act like that, Elsa. You'll be—all right."

"Oh, yes?" she said, and shot him a gleamingly vindictive look. "If it wasn't for you," she began, and stopped and bit her lip again. Shorty, his eyes glacial, said they'd go any time.

"But neither of us knows anything about this murder," he said. "You can't fasten this on me or on her." He looked bitterly at something on the table and said with heavy sarcasm, "Me, with guns on me, killing a guy like that!"

Susan followed his gaze. Two business-like revolvers lay at the other end of the table, guarded by a policeman. Shrodt's guns. Undoubtedly—Shrodt's.

"I won't go to the station!" said the girl. Her voice, normally deep in her throat and rather vehement, rose to a high, shrill defiance. Her hands were unsteady; she pulled off her gloves and bared large, strong-looking fingers and gleaming, pointed nails.

There was a large diamond on her left hand. It was so very large that Susan looked at it with a kind of incredulousness, wondering how Elsa had succeeded in getting her glove over it.

The girl went on, "I won't go, and you can't make me. I—I'm an important witness in the trial next week. If you take me to the station I won't testify as the D.A. wants me to." She went quickly around the table, her small hips sinuous and outlined sharply by her tight, short skirt. She slipped her large, jeweled hand through Steve Cavan's arm and looked up coaxingly into his face. "You won't let them take me, will you, Mr. Cavan? You know what I promised to do for the D.A. You won't—"

He patted her hand. "There won't be a trial," he said calmly. "Gowdy's dead."

"But, Mr. Cavan," she said, all soft appeal. "I didn't murder him. I—I wouldn't have murdered him. You don't understand—"

Shrodt was looking uneasy. He said, "You'd better come along, Elsa. You won't get anywhere with that—"

"Shrodt's right," said Steve Cavan. "I can't help you."

"But you work for the D.A.," she said. "You've got influence with him."

He unloosed her hand "I've no authority to speak for him. Run along, my little flower. It won't hurt you. Go to the station and tell the captain everything you haven't told me. Chances are he'll let you go."

"Not if I know it," said Sergeant O'Keefe, rumbling. He looked around the room, and his eyes fell on Susan. He said, "And you, too, young lady."

"M-me?" said Susan, startled.

"You were here alone with him. You claim he was dead. Your story—"

"But I didn't even know the man," cried Susan with some vehemence. "I told you exactly what happened. I—"

"Bring her along, too," said O'Keefe to one of the policemen, who instantly advanced and

took Susan's elbow in an extraordinarily firm grasp.

Elsa demanded, "Who is she?"

Nobody answered. O'Keefe was looking at a sheaf of notes handed him by the policeman who had taken down, probably in shorthand, the whole conversation.

Elsa said, "I never saw her before! She's not the alderman's wife! Who is she?" She stopped, and her eyes glittered and she said to Shorty, *"Who is she?"*

"I don't know," said Shrodt apathetically. "It's nothing to me."

"If she knew Gowdy," said Elsa. "If she heard about it and came to stop—"

Shrodt said, "Shut up, Elsa. I tell you I never saw her before."

And Steve Cavan said suavely, "Stop what, Elsa? Stop what?"

"I told you to shut up," said Shrodt. He eyed Steve Cavan coldly and said, "Elsa's just talking. What could anybody stop? The trial was all set. Elsa was going to do what the D.A. told her to do and appear as witness against Gowdy. It doesn't look as if she'd murder him, does it?"

"Maybe," said Steve Cavan softly, "he decided to murder her. With your help perhaps, my good Shorty. And she turned the tables on you." He turned to the girl with an air of impersonal yet friendly advice. "If that's the way of it, Elsa, if that's what happened, you'll save yourself a lot of trouble by telling the truth. Self-defense as a plea, plus your beautiful eyes, would get you off with any jury. Although," he added a little crisply, "that's not a promise."

"Don't I know it's not a promise!" flared the girl, her eyes again vindictive. "I wouldn't trust one of you that far!" She measured an infinitesimal distance with a wide thumb and forefinger.

O'Keefe said, "All right, let's go. Bring 'em along." He started for the door.

Susan was aware of a propelling motion in the heavy grip on her elbow.

Steve Cavan said, "Look here, O'Keefe. I brought Miss Dare here. I don't think she knew this apartment, or Gowdy."

"She was on the El, with you, wasn't she? The same car?"

"Yes."

"She admitted coming into the apartment, didn't she?"

"Yes. But she said she heard sounds—"

O'Keefe glanced at Susan. "Does she look like the kind of dame that would run into a strange, dark apartment, after midnight, because she heard sounds? She'd run all right, but she'd run the other way. It was a good story, Steve, but she's got to come, too."

"All right," said Steve Cavan.

"Anything you say. And you may be right, at that. I'll bring her."

Susan, lost in a rather horrifying vision of herself haled into jail, white satin and all, and with no money for bail (or did they allow bail when it was murder?) was unaware of the commotion at the living-room door until it advanced on a wave of blue-coated figures and loud voices to the dining-room where it stopped.

O'Keefe surged forward and said, "What's all this? Who've you got there?"

VII

The commotion made itself orderly, and proved to be three policemen around a nucleus which was heard to protest dejectedly that it didn't want to see no police and wasn't doing anything, anyway. Then somebody moved, so Susan could see the owner of the protesting voice —a man, shifty, thin, shabby, with the indefinably lost look of the homeless.

"Where'd you find him?" demanded the sergeant.

"Hiding in a doorway—down Lane Street."

"Wasn't hiding," murmured their captive apathetitcally. "It was raining."

"No sign of the alderman?" said the sergeant.

"No, Sergeant."

"Find out about his family; get hold of his friends. Get a line on his hangouts. All right, now." He looked at the thin man, and said, "What's your name?"

A murmur was heard to the effect that it was Joe Rogers.

Upon which there was a movement in the circle, and McCabe advanced to the rumble in the rear of the sergeant.

"That's right," said Sergeant O'Keefe. "You've changed your name, Joe, and shaved off your mustache. Last time you were at the station you were Joe Smith."

"Aw, now, Sergeant," said the man, twisting his battered hat. "Give a man a police record and then blame everything that happens on him. I didn't kill Gowdy. I don't know anything about it. There I was waiting for the rain to let up and you go dragging me here for nothing."

"How'd you know Gowdy was killed?" said O'Keefe.

Joe looked startled. "They—they asked me," he muttered.

O'Keefe looked at the policemen flanking Joe Rogers. "Is that so? Did you mention Gowdy?"

There was the hint of an uneasy glance not quite exchanged among them. One said, "Maybe."

Another said he didn't think so.

"Empty his pockets," said Sergeant O'Keefe.

Joe Rogers looked suddenly

pale and dirty and wretched. "Have a heart, copper," he said wearily. "I ain't done nothing. What if I did pick something I see laying there on the street! It ain't no harm—I didn't murder the big stiff. Honest to God, I—"

McCabe had pulled something glittering from one of the sagging pockets, and a wrist watch and a ring set with a large diamond blinked and shone on the table, where he dropped it.

"Gowdy's?" asked the sergeant, and Shorty Shrodt nodded.

"Well—" The sergeant turned back to Joe Rogers. "Getting ambitious, aren't you, Joe? Been picking pockets long enough and decided to get into the big money, huh? Want to confess before we take you to the station?"

Joe's thin hands were twisting and writhing. "Honest to God, I ain't done nothing. Honest to God, Sergeant. I picked them things up in the street. Over on Lane Street. They was just laying there in the gutter and I saw 'em. I—"

"Oh, sure; watches and diamond rings grow in this neighborhood instead of grass. Come on, now, tell the truth. How'd you kill Gowdy? Why? Did you get scared?"

Joe's reply was unexpected. His hands writhed, rejecting the deed in an ecstasy of terror, and then quite suddenly he went a kind of gray-white and collapsed like a heap of shabby old clothes upon the floor.

For a moment nobody moved. Someone back of Susan said, "Little rat, he's not got the guts for murder—"

And Sergeant O'Keefe said gruffly, "Pick him up. You can take him to the station, boys . . . Well, Steve—guess that's done."

Steve Cavan was looking somberly at the shabby heap on the floor. "I guess so," he said.

Susan had moved forward. "He's hungry," she said.

Steve Cavan looked at her quickly. "Probably," he agreed.

"But—why didn't he take the wallet, too? It had the money in it."

Steve Cavan shrugged. "Lost his nerve, I guess."

Shrodt said, "Want us to come with you just the same, Sergeant?"

"Certainly not," flashed Elsa. Her eyes fastened avidly on the diamond that had once shone on Elihu Gowdy's large, swarthy hand and now lay on the table.

"Certainly not," said the girl again. "He did it." Her bright eyes touched and spurned the shabby heap on the floor and went back to the diamond. "No station for me," she said blithely. "But I'll take—I mean, I'll take care of his jewelry." Her hand with its pointed, gleaming fingernails shot out toward the little heap, and Shrodt's hand, fine

and poised and strong as a pianist's, shot out too, and gripped the girl's hand.

"Don't be a damn' fool," he said gratingly. He looked at O'Keefe. "All right, Sergeant. What about it? Now you've got the fellow that killed him, are you going to let us go?"

His voice was conciliatory.

"No," said Sergeant O'Keefe, and nodded to one of the policemen. "All right," he said. "Get under way. Take Shorty and the girl along."

There were protestations, shrill on the girl's part, suddenly cut off as the door into the bright, white vestibule closed after them. Sergeant O'Keefe sighed.

"Well," he said, looking at the heap of clothing that claimed to be Joe Rogers, "well, I guess he did it. But I certainly didn't think it'd turn out like this."

"No," said Steve Cavan.

"With all the people in the world that might've wanted to murder Elihu Gowdy, seems queer for little Joe Rogers to do it. For a diamond ring."

"Right," said Steve Cavan.

"I didn't expect the case to break so soon, either," said Sergeant O'Keefe unhappily. "I'd feel better if the alderman would turn up."

"Ah," said Steve Cavan. "The missing alderman. I'd like to see him myself."

"Mm—yes. Yes, so would I. But Joe had Gowdy's jewelry. No doubt about that."

Susan looked at Joe Rogers, and was deeply troubled. Things weren't right. They didn't balance. They left too much unaccounted for. She looked at Joe Rogers's thin, dirty hand dangling inertly as the policeman lifted the small, limp body to the divan, and didn't think that the hand was strong enough and steady enough to do what a hand had done.

And something was changed in the crowded living-room; something was out of place. On the crowded table stood a tall brass candlestick. A very heavy candlestick which had previously stood on the also crowded mantel. Evidently, then, it had been under discussion during her sojourn in the kitchen. She said to Steve Cavan, "It was the candlestick, then?"

He nodded absently. "Looks like it," he said. "But there are no fingerprints on it. However, I believe they found a sort of smear, as if the thing had been wiped."

"Yes, I know," replied Susan, also absently, and started for the kitchen again. She was only half aware of Steve Cavan's quick and somewhat startled look.

Sergeant O'Keefe said, "Wait a minute, young lady. Where are you going?"

"To get Joe something to eat," she said.

"Let her go," said Steve Cavan. "Here—I'll go along. I won't let her get away."

"Okay," said Sergeant O'Keefe, and went to the telephone.

The kitchen was exactly as it had been, except that the two policemen had gone. The windows glittered black and shiny behind small, ruffled curtains and rain slanted heavily and drearily against them. The door was closed. The sink and table were still laden with unwashed dishes. The gay and festive cake stood on the shelf, but one of the policemen had tidily covered it with a piece of waxed paper. Everything was the same, except that the milk in the dish under the sink was gone.

Susan couldn't believe it. She crossed the kitchen, and stared down incredulously at the small dish. But it was certainly empty to the last drop. As certainly as, when she last looked at it, it had held a little milk. She had an unnerving vision of one of those stalwart policemen disposing of the milk.

"You look cheerful," said Steve Cavan. "What's the joke?"

"It isn't a joke," said Susan, sobering at once.

"What is it, then? You've a very cryptic look on your face."

"Cryptic is a good word," said Susan. "Well—cocoa must be in this cupboard."

He watched her as she moved about the kitchen, assembling cocoa, sugar, milk. She found bread and a toaster and set Steve Cavan to toasting slices of bread.

"That looks good," he said, sniffing the cocoa. "Make enough for me, too. And for Sergeant O'Keefe. It may soften him."

"I don't want to go to the station," said Susan. She removed her mink and velvet coat, disclosing white shoulders. Steve Cavan left the toast to take her coat, and surveyed the white satin and white shoulders with something very close to approval. "However," she added, "if I must go, I suppose I must—"

"Perhaps I can get you off," said Steve Cavan soberly. "Of course, you realize that if I do it will put you under considerable obligation to me. I only extract the friends of my bosom from murder charges. Nobody else."

"The toast is burning," said Susan. "I was about to say it would be an interesting and valuable experience. So long as—"

"So long as it remains only an experience," said Steve Cavan a bit grimly, and swore. "This thing gets hot," he complained bitterly, blowing on his fingers. "I'd better start with some new slices of bread. Look here, you saw that candlestick?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know that was the weapon. I only thought it might

have been." She stirred the cocoa and tasted it.

"I see. Well, do you think Joe Rogers might have murdered Gowdy?"

"No, I do not," said Susan directly.

Something clicked, and the toast shot up, and Steve Cavan swore again and clutched it as if it might escape him. "Who did kill him, then?"

"I don't know," said Susan somberly. She looked at the empty little milk dish thoughtfully. "But I'd like to stay here for a while," she ventured at last. "Can't we go to the station later—if we have to go. The alderman—"

"Right," said Steve Cavan. "I think so, too. All right, my pettikins. I'll do what I can with the sergeant if you'll promise not to try to escape me. He'll make me responsible for you."

"I won't escape," said Susan. "Not just now, anyway."

He gave her a long and somewhat enigmatic look. "If you do try to get away, my little lamb pie," he said cheerfully, "I'll grab you by your curls and drag you back again. Here, I'll carry that tray."

Susan smoothed her hair nervously. "It's queer about the alderman."

"Do you think the alderman killed him?"

"I don't know," she said, and shivered a little, as if a cold, small wind had blown through the kitchen.

He put down the tray and took her coat and held it for her, slipping it gently over her shoulders. "Keep that on," he said. "You'll freeze to death if you don't. Now for Joe—"

Susan went first, holding the swinging door so he could get through with the tray.

They all watched in silence, the policemen, Sergeant O'Keefe, and Steve Cavan, while Joe drank the cocoa and ate the toast. He looked thinner and shabbier propped up by Mrs. Glanger's bright and fancy sofa cushions. And less and less like a candidate for murderer, thought Susan, watching his unsteady, thin hands.

He was grateful for the food. He said, "Thank you, miss," in a sodden, resigned way, and waited for handcuffs.

They didn't put them on him; Susan was glad of that. And in the end, when the police left, with Joe shambling along amid them, Susan was left in the apartment with Steve Cavan and one policeman.

"As soon as Glanger gets here I'll bring him to the station," said Steve Cavan.

"And you'll be responsible for Miss Dare?" said Sergeant O'Keefe.

"But certainly," said Steve, looking severely at Susan.

"I would take your word for

a lot," said Sergeant O'Keefe broodingly. "And if you say she's all right, maybe she is. But she'll have to convince the captain. And, besides, she knows too much," he added, and followed his armed force out the door, leaving Susan, Steve Cavan, and a policeman.

"Murphy's my name," said the policeman, replying to Steve Cavan's inquiry. "And Sergeant said to wait for Glanger and not let in any reporters if they get wind of it and get here sooner than he expects. And," added Murphy, looking uncomfortable, "I'm to keep an eye on things."

"The majesty of the law," said Steve Cavan. "Even one of the wheels of the D.A.'s machinery —meaning your humble servant —is not immune from a healthy suspicion . . . What's wrong, Susie?"

She was regarding the policeman, Murphy, with some doubt and uneasiness, for he had settled himself in an armchair with the look of one who intends remaining. There was a stolidity about him which suggested that nothing short of fire or pestilence was likely to stir him from that chair, and Susan, although she had her small gifts, was not prepared to evoke either.

"N-nothing," she said, and sat down, herself. After all, Glanger couldn't get much wetter, certainly, then he was already; and the chances were that, now, he was perfectly comfortable and dry.

Minutes ticked themselves away, and no one spoke. Murphy shifted a bit in his great armchair, carefully adjusted his hand so it clasped his revolver, and permitted himself to lean back so his head rested on the back of the chair. But he was wide awake. Even his shoes looked enormously efficient. Susan stored away certain details of shoes and uniform against future use.

Time passed. Really, quite a lot of time, she realized with surprise, looking at the clock. Fate, she decided, needed a nudge.

She felt very tired and very disheveled, and the smear on her white satin dress, a smear already turning faint brown, was unpleasant. She decided that there was such a thing as going too far for art's sake. But she thought of Joe Rogers, and his thinness and his shabbiness. And glanced at Steve Cavan, who happened to be looking at her.

They exchanged a long, rather queer look. Steve's eyes were unfathomable. Neither moved nor spoke, yet there was in the oddest way a kind of communication set up between them. And Susan, without premeditation, without plan, made the slightest motion of her head toward the vestibule door and glanced at the policeman. She couldn't be sure for a

moment or two that it was really, as it seemed, communication.

But presently Steve Cavan got up, yawned, and walked around the room, pausing to examine various objects of what Mrs. Glanger obviously felt were art, and lighted another cigarette. Finally he went to the front window, along the wall near the vestibule door. He peered through the blank, shining windowpane, wet with rain and reflecting eerily sections of the living-room.

He looked again through the windowpane, cupping his hands to see the better. Murphy lifted his head to watch.

And Steve Cavan said, "There's nobody there. I guess I was wrong."

"You what?" The policeman was all at once on his feet, dislodged with incredible rapidity. "You can't mean—"

Steve Cavan continued to look out the window. But he said briskly again that he was wrong. "Nobody's out there," he said again. "I'm sure of it. Anyway, it wouldn't be Glanger."

Murphy went to stand beside Steve Cavan, cupped his own hands around his face, and puffed heavily while he stared into darkness and rain. Then he said, "I'd better see."

"But, Murphy, I tell you there's nobody."

"Something's moving out there. I saw it, too."

"Wind," said Steve Cavan, with however a neat element of doubt in his voice.

Murphy buttoned the top button of his jacket and took his cap.

"I'll go see," he said in a voice that bode ill for anybody lurking in the shadow of the shrubs. He banged the vestibule door behind him.

VIII

Steve Cavan looked inquiringly at Susan. "Well?" he said.

Susan put her hand uncertainly to her hair, rose and went to the dining-room door, and said clearly. "The police are gone. You can come out, now, Mr. Glanger."

"What—he's not here!" cried Steve Cavan. "Don't—"

"Sh-h," said Susan, putting her hand on his arm. She raised her voice a little again: "Mr. Steve Cavan, of the district attorney's office is here. He says if you'll come out you can tell him your story and he'll see that the police get the right angle on it. Won't you please come out, Mr. Glanger, before the police get back?"

Steve Cavan was swearing under his breath. A profane person, thought Susan austerely.

And the kitchen door began to open. It stopped Steve Cavan's low-muttered but highly colored remarks. There was utter and

complete silence in the apartment.

The door opened wider. Silence lengthened.

Then Steve Cavan said, but this time rather devoutly, "My God, what's that!"

A small brown muff appeared in the doorway and was endowed with means of locomotion, for it advanced in a measured way into the dining-room, where it stopped.

"My God!" breathed Steve Cavan again.

"It's only the dog," said Susan. "It's been out—that's why it's so wet."

Two brown, shining buttons appeared in the front end of the muff. Then it went to stand suspiciously beside a certain area of the dining-room rug and lifted a blunt nose and sniffed. It rather upset Susan. She said sharply, "Mr. Glanger—"

And Mr. Glanger, looking very sheepish and very wet, emerged.

At least, it proved to be Mr. Glanger; Susan had never seen him before. He had an anxious face with a trembling chin. His small stomach looked exactly as if he's swallowed a melon whole. And his sad brown eyes were disinclined to look directly at anything.

They darted anxiously around, and fastened on Steve; and Steve stopped muttering and said sharply, "Come out here, Glanger."

He advanced. The door swung to behind him and he rubbed his hands together. "Is that right?" he ventured squeakily. "Can I count on you, Mr. Cavan?"

Steve Cavan shot Susan a glance of nicely blended bitterness and approval. "Up to a point," he said. "I'll see that the police get your story exactly as you tell it to me."

"But you — you'll listen," pleaded Susan.

He looked severe. "I'll listen," he said, rather grudgingly. "But hurry up, Glanger. Murphy—the policeman—will be back pretty soon."

Glanger advanced into the living-room, and looked dejectedly around.

"What has been going on here?" he demanded of Steve Cavan. "Why did the police—?"

"Come off that Glanger," said Steve Cavan coolly. "You know very well. Otherwise you would not have been hiding—" He broke off sharply and looked at Susan and said, "How'd you know?"

"Never mind. Ask him why Gowdy—"

"Thank you," said Steve Cavan coldly. "I can figure out a few questions myself."

"Why don't you, then? You're wasting time."

"No smart talk, my pet. Re-

member you're my prisoner, by golly. Now then, Glanger, why did Elihu Gowdy come here tonight?"

"Gowdy?" said Glanger, staring, and looking so guileless that, thought Susan, you could cut the layer of innocence with a knife. But Steve Cavan would have none of it.

"Look here, Glanger. You've got about five minutes before Murphy gets back. If you don't tell me what you know I'll let Murphy take you straight to the station."

Glanger said, "I don't know anything. I knew — knew Gowdy—"

"And you know he's dead."

The former alderman's sad eyes fell. He said, "Yes. When —when I came back I saw the police cars. I hung around so they couldn't see me and I heard the talk. I—well—" he cleared his throat anxiously. "I saw them take Gowdy away. But I don't know who killed him."

"Did you?" inquired Steve Cavan neatly.

Glanger started backward and turned pale green and flung out small hands. "No. No, Steve. Before God I didn't. I don't know who it was."

"Where have you been?"

"After the dog," said Susan in a small voice.

Glanger gave her a grateful look, and nodded vigorously. "That was it," he said. "My dog. My wife's dog, that is. I opened the door for Gowdy and Terry shot out the door like a bat out of hell. I—I had to go after him. If my wife came home and he was lost—"

"You mean to say you've been chasing that dog all this time?" Steve asked.

"No," said Glanger unhappily. "Not all the time. I found him finally over near Washington Boulevard. It was raining, so I went into a drugstore to wait. But I was—I mean, I thought I ought to come home. So finally I did. But there were police and, as I say, I couldn't help hearing what had happened. I waited around outside, hanging onto the dog."

He gave the brown muff a bitter glance which was received with a certain complacence on the dog's part. "Then after the police left I let myself into the kitchen, and hid in the little storeroom back there, thinking everybody would be leaving pretty soon. I—well, that's all really."

"Why did Gowdy come here?"

"I don't know."

"None of that, Glanger. You said you opened the door for him. You were expecting him. Why?"

The former alderman thought for a moment, and said, brightening a little, that Gowdy hadn't had time to tell him the reason for his visit. "He came in and

the dog shot out, and I—I said I'd get the dog and be right back. That's all."

"It was too late for a casual call. You had an appointment with him."

"No, that's wrong. He—he just came. I was about to go to bed."

Susan said, "Was Elsa with Gowdy when he came?"

"Why, cer—" The former alderman caught himself, gulped, and said, "I just saw Gowdy. Why don't you let me in on this? Who killed him?"

"You're sure," said Steve Cavan, "that *you* didn't?"

Again the alderman turned a lively shade of green. "No, no! Why should I kill him? He was my friend—"

"We know Elsa was here," said Susan gently. "Did she leave when you left?"

"Huh?" he said in a startled way. "Elsa? Did she admit—?"

Steve Cavan said, "Glanger, you know Elsa Kausca was our star witness against Gowdy. Why did he meet her here? Was he trying to buy her off? But he couldn't have done that—it was too late. The D.A. made her understand that she couldn't possibly have turned around and denied the admissions she had already made. She had seen money change hands; her apartment was the meeting place between Gowdy and the fellows who ran the pay-off joints."

"I know, I know—everybody knows."

"Then, since we've got all this, why was she meeting Gowdy?"

The former alderman shook his head, and looked sly. "I tell you I don't know."

"But she was here?"

"Yes, she was here." He gulped and said, "She came in with Gowdy. But that's all I know," he cried jerkily. "That's all I know. They came together. But I didn't hear a word. Maybe I told 'em to sit down or something and that I'd be right back. But that's all."

"So your statement is that Elsa Kausca was here with Gowdy when you left the apartment?"

"No—that is, yes. Yes, she was here." Glanger's pale forehead was glistening.

"Apparently on good terms with Gowdy?"

"I—I only saw them for a moment. How should I know?"

"You wouldn't think," said Steve Cavan slowly, "that Gowdy would be on good terms with the woman who had promised the D.A. to testify against him. She meant conviction to him. You'd think Gowdy would shoot her on sight."

Quite suddenly and sharply a small scene out of the kaleidoscope that was the night flashed across Susan's memory. The girl Elsa, painted and proud in her

new furs and her smart hat, standing on the El platform—standing so that for a sharp instant or two she and Susan were directly opposite. And the girl's painted face had held a quickly changing look; pleased recognition—and then a flash of fear in those bright eyes. Fear—of Gowdy? Why not?

But the former alderman was protesting again. "I tell you, Gowdy wouldn't shoot anybody. He never did. He never carried a gun, even. Everybody knew that."

Steve Cavan said slowly, "Then your feeling is that Elsa had more to fear from Gowdy than he from—anyone? But that Gowdy wouldn't have killed her?"

"Y-yes," said Glanger reluctantly.

The little dog left the area of carpet beside the dining-room table, walked into the living-room, gave Susan and Steve a bored look, and jumped up onto a silk cushion on a chair.

"There's always Shorty Shrodt," said Steve.

Glanger didn't move at all. He didn't even blink. He said, after a moment, very positively, "Shorty wouldn't hurt Elsa Kausca."

"How about kidnapping?" said Steve. "I don't suppose either Gowdy or Shrodt would hesitate at that."

Glanger's eyes widened a little. He adopted the idea after that first instant, with enthusiasm. "That's it!" he cried. "Maybe they were going to kidnap her. That's it! What an idea. I didn't dream of it, of course, when they came. But that's very likely what they intended—"

"Do you really think," said Steve softly, "that Elsa Kausca would let herself be kidnapped?"

Glanger wilted again. His hands went out this time in a defensive gesture. "How should I know?" he said again.

Susan felt very tired and kept thinking it was time for Murphy to come back. She said, "Mr. Glanger, you used to be alderman?"

He glanced at her, a little puzzled by her presence. "Yes."

"Gowdy was always his friend," said Steve dryly.

"I know," said Susan. "Mr. Glanger do you mind telling me what you do now? I mean, your business — the — well," said Susan, feeling too tired for anything indirect, "the source of your income?"

Glanger bridled. "I don't know what right—oh, well, if you insist. I—I have a small private income."

Susan ignored the belligerence. She said, "How long has Mrs. Glanger been away?"

"Since yesterday," said Glanger. "She went to see her cousins. In Michigan."

Steve said again, "Listen,

Glanger. If there's nothing more you will tell us about this we may as well go to the station."

Glanger pressed against the wall. His hunted brown eyes wavered from Steve to Susan and back again. "All right," he said at last. "All right, then; I'll have to go. I don't know anything about this murder. And nobody can prove I do. I'll go with you. Wait till I get some dry clothes on."

"Okay," said Steve. He glanced at his watch. "Go ahead, but hurry."

Glanger scuttled away without a word.

IX

Steve Cavan went to the vestibule door, opened it, and crossed the white, shiny little vestibule to hold open the outer door and peer into the darkness. He came back, looking perplexed.

"Funny," he said, "why Murphy doesn't get back. You don't suppose he—really saw someone?"

"Did you?" said Susan directly.

"Of course not. I told him I didn't. I didn't know why on earth you wanted him out of the way, but I—" He stopped, gave her a long look, and said, "How did you know Glanger was here?"

"The milk in the dog's dish was gone," said Susan briefly. "Steve, why was he so certain Shrodt wouldn't hurt Elsa Kausca?"

"Glanger? I don't know." His eyebrows were still knitted in a scowl. "What do you mean—milk in the dog's dish? How did you know there *was* a dog?"

His gaze grew more intent.

Susan smoothed her hair nervously. "There were scratches on the bedroom door," she said briefly. "A dish with milk in it under the sink. But no dog and no alderman. Then when we went into the kitchen again to get cocoa for Joe the milk was gone. Therefore the dog had returned. And therefore the alderman—" She broke off and said, "I wish I knew why Shrodt wouldn't shoot Elsa!"

Steve Cavan pushed his hands rather savagely through his hair and said, "Who are you? Oh, never mind. I don't expect an answer. I know you say your name is Susan Dare. And it still seems to me I've heard that name somewhere. But—are you by any chance a policewoman in disguise?"

"If you must know," said Susan wearily, "I'm a Soviet spy . . . Do you suppose a bakery would be open at this hour?"

He gave her a glance of deep disapproval. "I don't feel exactly larky. Why a bakery?"

"The name is Kosivetsky. Address, twenty-something, Madison."

He looked genuinely startled. "You!"

"Good heavens, no!" said Susan exasperated. "The bakery. It's in the Loop. I suppose there's not a chance of getting the order desk before morning."

"Listen, Mata Hari. If you want a nice order of buns for breakfast—"

"I don't," she assured him. "I want to know why Mr. Glanger ordered a cake. A very fancy cake," she added almost affectionately, "and a very good cake. I had some, and the policemen—" She stopped short, and said in a sharp whisper, *"What's that?"*

Steve Cavan had heard it, too. A dull yet curiously reverberating thump from somewhere back toward the kitchen, and it was curiously reverberating because it was followed by a series of repeated thumps, heavy, and gradually diminishing until they stopped altogether. Stopped, and left utter silence again in the apartment.

The dog lifted its head and put up its ears and rumbled tinily in its throat.

Susan swallowed her heart, which had got into her throat, and looked at Steve Cavan with startled eyes.

The dog stood up and whined a little, and then got down and trotted to the kitchen door and whined again. Steve Cavan looked around the room and picked up the fire tongs and started across the dining-room.

Susan must have floated along in his wake, though she had no consciousness of moving. She did know however, definitely, that she didn't intend to be left alone in that haunted room. She was just behind Steve when, cautiously, gripping the fire tongs in his right hand, he swung open the door leading to the kitchen.

The dog, a brown, animated muff, trotted busily through it and stopped abruptly. Then it whined again, and darted under the stove.

Susan peered around Steve Cavan's shoulder. No one was in the kitchen. After a moment they entered, warily, Steve first.

Nothing was changed. Nothing, except that four oranges lay on the floor, and a tipped-over paper bag, containing more. Susan saw it and pointed.

"That!" said Steve. "But how—?" And then they both saw it.

The back door, unlatched, swung noiselessly open and inward. Steve gripped his fire tongs. Susan shrank a little backward.

But nothing advanced through that gradually widening aperture of moist darkness. Wind? But who had left the door open?"

"Stay here," said Steve Cavan, and went across to the door and jerked it wide.

"The bag of oranges fell,"

said Susan. "Someone must have brushed past—"

Apparently he didn't hear her, for he was staring out into the darkness—a perfect target, she thought suddenly, for a killer lurking out there, waiting his chance.

"Nothing," he said, and half closed the door again and looked at her. And added in an odd voice, "It's taking Glanger a long time to dress."

"I think there's an areaway down there," said Susan in a small voice.

"I'm going down. Stay here." He looked at the latch and pushed the night lock so he could re-enter. Then he gave her another quick and admonitory glance. "Stay here. And I mean that."

And he was gone. Out of that haunted flat, into darkness.

She couldn't obey. She got to the door in time to hear him say in the strangest, tightest voice, sharply through the darkness, "Glanger! — Glanger, is that you? Glanger—" He stopped.

Rain struck her face. A few steps, slippery with rain, went downward. She found and clutched the cold, wet railing alongside the steps. Light from the kitchen behind her streamed eerily into the night, and made a diffused kind of twilight. At the foot of the steps was a dark blotch—a figure. No, two figures, one bending over the other.

Steve turned toward her, his face white and queer in that stream of light. "It's Glanger."

Her throat was dry. "Is he—"

"He's dead," said Steve in the strangest voice, and held up his hand so that the light fell full upon it. The fingers had a dark, ugly wetness streaked across them.

Susan couldn't move and couldn't speak. For one awful moment it seemed as if the murmurous, rainy night was watching her with a thousand glittering eyes.

Steve moved—heavily, as if he had to force his muscles to obey him. "Hold this," he said, and thrust the fire tongs at her. She took them, almost mechanically. Again he bent over the sagging, queerly huddled blotch there at the foot of the steps.

"What—?" she managed, in a kind of whisper.

And Steve said, "I don't know. There's blood. No heartbeat, though."

What was he doing down there in the dusk? She moved, so she would not cast a shadow, and Steve said huskily, "Yes, he's dead, all right. It's queer, but I think he's been shot. Or knifed, maybe. There wasn't any sound of a shot."

"Knifed—" She whispered that, too."

And instantly, on her very word, there came the sound of a shot. An enormous, crashing

sound that rocked the neighborhood, rocked the night, crashing upward through the rain and reverberating like a thunderclap. It was not repeated.

Steve jumped to his feet and stared into the darkness. "Get back in the house!" he cried, and seized her around the waist and swung her into his arms and up the steps and into the kitchen again.

He flung the door to behind him and set her down rather hard on her feet and listened. "That," he said, "was a police revolver. A forty-five."

Susan swallowed hard and was grateful for his supporting arm, still tight around her. And footsteps came hurtling up the steps and the door flung wide again.

A revolver was visible. Then a blue uniform, and Murphy's voice sharp with concern. "Are you all right, sir? *Glanger's dead.*"

"I know," said Steve. "What do you mean shooting at me—?"

But Murphy didn't heard him. His eyes had gone to Susan and to the fire tongs in her hand. He advanced slowly, his eyes accusing. "You oughtn't to have done that, miss." And to Steve, "You oughtn't to have let her out of your sight, Mr. Cavan. All I do is take a walk around the block because I see a car parked down there with no lights. And when I don't find anybody and get back, you've gone and killed an alderman." Murphy shook his head, "This will take some explaining at headquarters. You're under arrest, young lady."

"Don't be a fool, Murphy!" Steve exclaimed angrily. "Whoever killed him can't be far away." He released Susan and took the fire tongs away from her. "He must have gone that way!" He pointed toward the areaway. "Come on, Murphy!" At the door he turned, calling back to Susan, "Phone the station, will you, and tell whoever answers that Glanger's been killed. Tell 'em to get here as quickly as possible." He hesitated very briefly, as if a fleeting concern for her had crossed his mind. "You'll be all right," he said. "We won't be long," and vanished into the darkness, leaving Susan alone with the black windowpanes watching her.

But she knew that he knew she would be in no danger. The murderer, whoever he was, was at that moment putting as much distance between himself, and the apartment as he could—and as rapidly.

Automatically, because she'd been told to do it, she went into the dining-room and skirted the spot where Gowdy had lain. Gowdy. And now the former alderman.

She had never in her life had occasion to call the police. She

didn't know the number, and her hands shook so she couldn't look it up in the telephone book. After an obliging Information had told her what it was, she found it staring at her from the front page of the fat telephone book.

It took a few moments to reach the nearest station, but, once, connected, the desk sergeant seemed to know all about the thing and galvanized to sharp attention the instant she mentioned Glanger. She hung up with an impression that when she turned around a large body of police would be at her elbow.

And very welcome they would be, too. But naturally they were not there and the apartment looked extremely empty and extremely unpleasant. A haunted apartment.

She smoothed back her hair and wished Steve Cavan and Murphy would return. And then, mainly because she didn't like standing so near the spot where Gowdy's great body had sprawled, she walked into the living-room, and thoughtfully into the hall. The bedroom door at the end of it was open—evidently Glanger had started to change his clothing before his murderer—so quietly entering by the kitchen door that neither Steve nor she had heard him—had appeared and induced Glanger to go outside. Where, at the foot of the steps in the darkness and rain, murder had been quietly and efficiently and very swiftly done.

Why? Had Glanger resisted? Had they quarreled? But there hadn't been time for that.

Glanger had obviously been afraid to talk, which meant that he must have known something that made him dangerous to the murderer. And the murderer had swiftly and promptly decided that Glanger couldn't be trusted not to break under police inquiry. So another horror had been added to the night.

Black, winking windowpanes watched her. Rain moved steadily down them, giving them an added semblance of life. She wished she had not taken the Elevated. She wished she had had the money for a taxi. She wished she had not gone to the opera. She wished above all things that she were at home—in her own snug, small house with all the doors locked and all the windows bolted and the sense of warmth and security home always gave.

She looked at the little heap of articles Glanger had apparently taken from his pockets in preparation to putting on another suit of clothing. There was a key ring, a wallet with a few bills and identification cards, and a handful of change. And a piece of paper, folded.

She unfolded and read it. It was a very brief legal form, fill-

ed in with two names. She examined the cards in the wallet carefully and found one which she looked at for a long moment. Then she read the paper again. And stood staring at the window opposite her — which stared back, reflecting a slender woman in white satin and mink, with soft hair done in little curls and a pale face and frightened eyes.

For she knew why Gowdy had been murdered. She thought she knew who had murdered him. And there wasn't a shadow of evidence against the murderer. And she was afraid. No shadow of evidence.

But she realized suddenly that she was wrong! There was one small thing! Very small—which probably no one except the murderer knew about. She folded the slip of paper and stuffed it in the cuff of her velvet coat. And turned slowly back toward the hall.

She went into the living-room and looked all around. She knelt at last on the floor, peering into corner and under chairs.

At last she went into the bright, white vestibule, glittering in its tiles. She knelt there, too. On that white floor it ought to be easy to find. Unless, of course, she was wrong.

There was nothing to be found. The small thing her fingers groped for was definitely not anywhere in that white expanse of checkerboard flooring.

She considered the matter, kneeling there—and uttered a little exclamation of annoyance. The thing she sought couldn't possibly have fallen in the vestibule. If it was to be found at all it would be inside the living-room door. She rose and went again inside the living-room and, in order to have a better light upon the floor immediately inside the door, she left it open, so that light from the bright vestibule fell upon the heavy rug and upon her.

But perhaps she was wrong. The paper in her cuff was right —it had to be right. But perhaps her view of the psychology involved was all wrong. Perhaps the motive she ascribed to the murderer was not the right motive.

Besides, wasn't it rather presumptuous of her, Susan Dare, to attempt to solve a murder? And one that the police had already solved?

But they hadn't solved it, because Joe Rogers couldn't have murdered Glanger. And it was outside the realm of common sense to accept for a moment a theory that two murderers had converged that dark night upon that one apartment, upon that one small group. No, it couldn't be Joe Rogers. Whoever murdered Glanger must have murdered Gowdy. It was at least a safe hypothesis, a safe premise.

Besides, Joe Rogers, beaten and dejected though he looked, had not confessed before they took him away. And the sergeant had been, by his own admission, dissatisfied.

She lifted a small rug and searched below it. Where was the thing she hoped to find? It wouldn't be conclusive evidence perhaps, even if she found it. But it would point the way. It would take explaining.

Then quite suddenly her groping fingers encountered the thing she sought. It was a thin, small piece of metal. Very small, very thin, with tiny indentations on it. So small a thing to convict anyone of murder!

Clutching it tightly in her fingers, she started to rise. And fumbled as her feet got entangled in her skirt, and somehow turned. And stopped in the very act of it and realized suddenly that your heart can stop and your blood really can turn to ice.

Because someone stood there, close to her. And there was a kind of flash—bright and sharp—and it was a knife.

"Drop that!" a harsh voice commanded.

She did, instantly. Her fingers released the small bit of metal, so that it clattered thinly. It fell outside the doorway and onto the white vestibule floor.

"Now turn around. Face the other way."

She did that, too. Instantly.

Aware of the bright vestibule behind her. Aware of a slight motion, as if whoever stood there had bent to retrieve the bit of metal and swiftly straightened up again. And aware, too, and that was perhaps the worst, that there was something very hard and sharp pressing into her velvet coat. A knife. Glanger, they'd said, had been knifed.

"Now give me that paper—no, put up your hand. I'll take it! Don't move."

She put up her hand. The white edge of the paper showed below her cuff. She didn't move. Probably she didn't even breathe.

The paper was swiftly, instantly removed, and there was a small crackle behind her. But that wasn't all.

"Now then, listen. You're going to turn around and walk ahead of me out into the street. Don't scream—do exactly as I say There's a car waiting out there, just around the corner. We'll go for a ride. Don't think you can get away with anything. All right. Turn around now, and don't make any false moves."

It wasn't possible. It couldn't happen. It happened to other people and one read about it, shrinkingly, in the newspapers. But it didn't happen to oneself. He'd seen her take the paper from Glanger's bedroom. Was that why Glanger had been murdered? Or simply because he

knew too much—had perhaps seen or heard too much before he left the apartment.

She turned, and the figure moved so it was still behind her.

"Open the door."

She saw, incredibly, her own hand on the latch, pulling the door open. It was only a step into the rain.

"Hurry up. Down the steps."

She went down the steps as if she were walking in her sleep. Involuntarily her hand moved as if to pick up her trailing skirts, and the pressure of the knife digging its sharp point into her velvet coat became firmer. She put her hand up again.

It was fantastic. And it was happening.

Rain was cold and wet on her face. No other figure moved in that deserted street. The little patter of her feet sounded ghostly.

The footsteps behind were light, too—furtive, and swift. They were at the corner before she would have thought it possible. She turned, as a firm hand grasping her shoulder indicated, into a dark, side street. They moved across a sidewalk, and the dark shape of a car, waiting without lights, loomed up ahead of her.

"Open—" said the voice behind her.

And, as if it had been a signal, tumult broke loose from somewhere near and engulfed her. Shouts, furious motion, the thud of body against body, and, loudly echoing and re-echoing, the heavy sounds of a revolver.

"A forty-five," thought Susan, and the pressure of that knife against her coat was gone, and she groped into the darkness, and found the step of the car. Then her knees gave way, depositing her simply and neatly on the step.

She was aware of the struggle going on, of the voices, of the thud of fists and panting breaths. Somebody shouted, hoarsely, "Don't shoot again!" Somebody shouted, "Got him! Hold the light!" Somebody yelled, "Look out! There's a knife!"

Her interest in the thing was curiously remote. She could barely see the black figures a few feet from her. She decided to put her head in her hands and go to sleep. In fact, she had to put her head in her hands and go to sleep. In fact, she had to put her head in her hands, because the blackness around her was whirling with dizzying spirals of light.

X

Somebody was shaking Susan. Somebody was saying, "Put your head down." Somebody's hand was placed firmly on top of her wet hair and it pushed her head down—down—down—

Gradually the darkness stop-

ped whirling and the pinwheels of lights disappeared.

"Are you hurt?"

"No. I—I don't think so."

"Don't faint!"

"I'm—all right—" Her voice seemed to come from an enormous distance.

"They've got him. It's all right."

The voice was very close to her ear. But then he was holding her in his arms tightly, pressing her head into his shoulder, talking with his mouth warm against her cheek. "I oughtn't to have left you there in the apartment. I never dreamed he'd come back. I thought that was the last place he'd want to be found. He—" The voice broke off and began to swear steadily and furiously.

"He—had to come back," said Susan, still from a great distance. "He had to have the license."

The voice stopped its soft swearing and said, "License!"

"He was going to marry Elsa. Gowdy, I mean. It was the only way to stop her testifying against him in the trial. If she was his wife she couldn't have testified. It's the law."

"Gowdy marry Elsa!"

"Yes. She—she had on a big diamond; she wore obviously new furs. There was the cake—a wedding cake. Glanger was a justice of the peace. There was a card, showing it, in his wallet. I suppose Gowdy secured the appointment for him. I found the license, too."

"But Shrodt—"

"Shrodt killed Gowdy when he and Gowdy and Elsa reached the apartment and Shrodt found out about the wedding. He was to be a witness, I suppose. No one else knew. He—he must have told them that he wouldn't be a witness and—and, you see, it was the telephone call Gowdy was trying to make. He must have been telephoning for someone to witness the ceremony. And Shrodt picked up the candlestick and killed him."

He nodded grimly.

"I think Elsa knew it. I think she was there when it happened. I think Glanger had gone, but he saw and heard enough to guess the truth. That's why he stayed away so long. After Shrodt killed Gowdy, he and Elsa left. They separated, thinking it better."

"She didn't tell—why would Shrodt kill Gowdy?"

"Because he was in love with Elsa, of course."

After a long moment Steve Cavan said in a hushed voice, "How do you know?"

Susan sighed. "Because he was so determined to keep her out of it, so sure she had never been at the apartment at all. There were only two possible reasons for that, that I could see. One was because she had something on him. The other was because

he loved her. Both must have been right. Elsa showed she felt she had some claim upon Gowdy when she tried to take his jewelry. She also showed she—liked jewelry, and—silver foxes. All the things Gowdy could give her."

Susan's voice had got smaller and smaller, like a phonograph record slowing up. She took a long breath. "I suppose you—or the police—can substantiate all that. Surely some of their intimates must have known Shrodt's feelings for Elsa. Glanger knew it."

She was vaguely aware of another commotion going on somewhere—cars throbbing, lights streaming into the darkness, voices and figures approaching them.

"Here's the sergeant," said Steve. "I suppose you'll have to tell him. If you don't mind—"

"I do mind," said Susan dismally. "I want to go home." And turned so her face pressed warmly against Steve Cavan's coat.

"It won't take long," he said. "Then I'll take you home."

And, oddly, it didn't take long.

Because they had Shorty Shrodt. Because they'd caught him almost red-handed. Because in the end, back in the lighted, tragic apartment, they found a small piece of metal in one of his pockets.

Sergeant O'Keefe, round face set and rigid, found it.

"That's it," said Susan. "It's the—the evidence."

"It looks," said O'Keefe, "like the tip of a shoelace."

"Yes. That's what it is." She took a long breath, smoothed back her hair.

"You see, Shrodt's shoe was laced wrong. I noticed it—oh, when he was standing there by the table. The lace had missed a hole or two, and the metal clip on one end of it was gone, and so lately gone that the end of the lace was still bright and clean. His shoes had been recently shined, but there were clean spots showing on the shoelace, and the end of it was clean. So it had to have been unlaced and removed, and then put back and laced up again—quickly, and thus not quite right—after he'd had that very recent shoeshine, for none of those clean spots had been touched with polish. And—well—"

She motioned toward the door into the vestibule, the door that had closed and bolted itself while she was kneeling beside Gowdy, paralyzed with shock. "Well, the door. The bolt. I kept thinking of it and how it had been bolted. And a shoelace would have done it. If you knew just how, as he must have known."

"Uh—" said O'Keefe. It

struck Susan that he had a kind of stunned look.

She said painstakingly, "He worked it from the outside with the shoelace. He was still in the apartment when I came in. He must have stopped to take Gowdy's ring and watch—intending to throw them away somewhere and entrap a scapegoat—a Joe Rogers," she interpolated rather severely. "At any rate, he must have been here when I entered. He must have gone from the kitchen to the hall, re-entered this room, when I was in such a position that I couldn't possibly see him, gone out this door, closed it and—and bolted it from the outside. You know how it's done."

"How?" said Steve Cavan.

"You run a loop around the slide, and then around the doorknob in order to direct the pull. Then you slide both ends through the keyhole—it would be especially easy with a shoelace on account of the metal tips. Then you close the door and pull the string gently till the slide engages the bolt. Then you simply withdraw the string through the keyhole. The shoelace, in this instance. And it caught somewhere and left this metal tip. That's — that's all," finished Susan. "Please, may I go home?"

Sergeant O'Keefe did not reply for a moment. He was looking at Susan very oddly. Presently he said, "It's easy enough to turn the slide that way. But how did you know? Well, go on."

"That's all," said Susan wearily again. "It had to be someone on the El. No one else would know of Gowdy's precise whereabouts. That is, if we rule out accident—and it seemed to me unreasonable to believe that some enemy of Gowdy's had just happened to encounter him. And Joe's shaky hands wouldn't have been steady enough to work the bolt. And I doubted, too, whether he would have thought quickly enough to try to make me a suspect. But of course," said Susan, ever so polite, "you had considered all this."

O'Keefe was looking, now, almost startled. So were McCabe and Murphy. O'Keefe cleared his throat. "Well, we had," he said cautiously, "and we hadn't."

"The taxi is here," said Steve. He was smiling a little, but he looked a little disconcerted, also.

And indeed Susan, herself, felt somewhat startled. But mainly she wanted to go home.

She started to speak, and all of them turned to listen with the most gratifying effect of homage.

"I was only going to say," said Susan, a little taken aback, "that I suppose Shrodt got out at once on bail—almost as soon as you reached the station."

"He did," said Sergeant O'Keefe. "He had a lawyer there with the money in less time than

it takes to tell it. They had things well organized that gang. And I'll kick myself for letting him get away with bail for a long time to come," said O'Keefe. "I'm very much in your debt about this, Miss Dare."

"Oh, no," said Susan sharply. "I just happened to see the shoelace. And to find the marriage license Gowdy gave Glanger. It was accident. Good-bye, Sergeant O'Keefe."

Sergeant O'Keefe shook hands vastly. "I could do with a few such accidents on the force," he said beaming. "If you ever want any help, Miss Dare, just call on me."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

"Sergeant O'Keefe," said Steve Cavan, guiding her for the last time down those wet and glistening steps, "Sergeant O'Keefe will be Lieutenant O'Keefe, unless I miss my guess. Which will further indebt him—"

Susan got in the taxi. She did not want to take an inadvertent last look at the apartment, so she shut her eyes. She was aware of motion and of great weariness—and dimly but soothingly of a warm arm holding her tight as they went around corners. Dawn was touching a quiet sky with gray and the rain had stopped when the taxi arrived at No. 9 Flintridge.

It jolted to a pause. A lean, cavernous face leered in from the front. Susan opened her eyes and saw it, and said, *"You!"*

The taxi driver smiled deeply. "I just thought I'd hang around," he said. "The police took me to the station and questioned me a little. Then I had a couple of fares—then I drove back to see how you were making out with your murder. Here you are, Mr. Cavan. Shall I wait?" The smile was almost tender.

"Certainly," said Steve Cavan, ignoring the smile.

Susan gathered her velvet coat around her. Again very helpful arms assisted her to descend and almost carried her to the house. He set her carefully on the doorstep, found the bell, and put his thumb on it and smiled down at her. Susan was aware of the taxi driver watching them fondly and approvingly.

Steve Cavan said, "If I hadn't left you alone in that apartment— Honestly, I thought it was safe when I left you in the vestibule, too. I had to get you off my hands because I had to stick to Gowdy . . . Listen. I haven't exactly qualified myself as an escort but—will you dine with me tomorrow night? I mean tonight."

"I think probably you saved my life," said Susan soberly.

"Having endangered it in the first place," he said. "I'm like O'Keefe. I could do with plenty of self-administered kicks."

"It's in the past now, anyway,"

said Susan. A loud, joyous bark arose from inside the house.

And Steve said suddenly, "Look here. How do you happen to know so much about the gentle art of murder? I mean, is your talent natural or acquired?"

"Neither," said Susan sleepily. "It's purely academic. I was just planning a murder," she said absently, "when the El car went off the track."

"Planning—" said Steve Cavan, and checked himself and laughed thinly. "You know, I thought you said you were planning a murder."

"That's what I did say," said Susan rather sharply. "But I—I'm not going to use a knife." She shivered a little.

Steve Cavan said suddenly, "Oh, for gosh sake! Now I know where I've heard your name! You—you write howling thrillers!"

"Detective stories," said Susan with dignity.

"Maybe you call 'em that," he said. "But I've read them. And I've been wanting to tell you," he went on, rousing to the subject, "that the solution in your latest book was all wrong. In real life you'd have been—" He stopped. He gave her a long look. "I guess you'd have been all right," he said. "Now then, what about dinner tonight?"

But Susan still had a question: "You were following Gowdy. You expected him to go to Glanger's flat?"

He grinned. "Yes, Miss Sherlock. I was following Gowdy. The D.A. had some of us trail him night and day. And when the lights went out on the El it seemed to me I'd have a better chance not to lose him if I went down the Elevated stairs and picked him and Shrodt up when they came down. I knew they wouldn't stay in the car till the trouble was corrected—it would have taken too long. So I hurried, clutching you because—oh, just because that dark car wasn't particularly healthy. But I didn't know the station platform went on to the transfer station and another stairway to the street."

A frown replaced his grin. "They went that way. And when I realized I'd lost them I remembered Gowdy's old pal, Glanger, lived in the neighborhood. They might be headed there, I thought, and it was my only chance to find them again. So I took you there because I had to catch up with Gowdy. Then, when the Glanger windows were all dark, I thought I'd guessed wrong — because Gowdy and Shrodt would have got there long before we did. You remember we sat for a while in that coffee shop. So I decided I'd lost their trail for the night and there was nothing left to do but find you a taxi . . .

"That's the way of it. I didn't

know you would turn out to be father's little helper. Believe it or not," he said, suddenly grave, "it really was my intention to rescue a maiden in distress."

"I thought seriously of your alibi at one time."

"That's nothing of what I thought of you," he said, and kissed her. Lightly. But rather pleasantly.

Susan's pulse stirred disconcertingly. Her breath was a little unsteady. She tried to move away from him, but he held her tightly. "Dear me," she said, achieving a rather shaky lightness. "What about the wife and three children?"

"I made it four, didn't I?" he said. "I thought four would be more reassuring. You looked a little scared."

Huldah was unbolting the door. He heard it, and said quickly, "I haven't any wife. Yet." And kissed her again. Not lightly this time.

The door was opening. Susan was aware of that, although a quite delightful haze seemed to have settled over the doorstep and the scrap of neat garden and the high brick wall. A kind of rosy haze, though dawn was still early.

But duty undone gave her a nudge. "Wait," she said quickly. "What is a pay-off joint?"

He grinned. "I'll tell you tonight. At eight. Good-bye till then, Susie."

THE SAINT OFFERS—NEXT MONTH—THESE HEADLINERS

THE ROMANTIC MATRON by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE SMELL OF DEAD MEN by SAX ROHMER

MURDER WITH FLOWERS by Q. PATRICK

THE POETICAL POLICEMAN by EDGAR WALLACE

THE HARMONICA MYSTERY by P. G. WODEHOUSE

REPRIEVE AT ELEVEN by FREDERICK NEBEL

murder in miniature

by . . . Leo Bruce

A knife hadn't far to travel to reach the heart of tiny Mr. Mumbo. But solving his murder meant walking many a crooked mile.

SERGEANT BEEF took a long pull at his pint of mild-and-bitter. "It's not often," he said, "that a case literally falls into your lap."

I knew that behind his bovine front, his ginger moustache and heavy manner, my old friend had one of the shrewdest brains in modern detection and had solved some of the trickiest cases of our time. So I gave him the encouragement he needed.

"What do you mean—falls into your lap?"

"Exactly what I said. And it didn't half give me a crack across the knees, either. In a train, it was. I was sitting there minding my own business, alone in a third-class carriage, when *wallop,* the train jerks and I find myself holding a corpse that's fallen out of the luggage-rack. And one of the strangest corpses you've ever seen, too. Two-foot-six, he was."

He nodded reminiscently. "I'm sure you'll remember the case. I got more publicity from it than from any other murder mystery I ever handled. You see, it was the

So fascinating a theme is "Death of a Midget" that it had formed an incomparable link uniting the most gifted of detective story writers with such lyrically inspired novelists as Walter de la Mare. But famed British mystery fiction author Leo Bruce has gone a step further and put a slain lilliputian right in the lap of a sleuth of such highly individualistic attainments that his story of the tragedy stirs dark waters as seldom before.

corpse of Little Mumbo which fell into my lap, the most famous midget in the world. It was up to me then to find out who had murdered him."

A long, thoughtful silence fell on the sergeant, and I realized with a jolt that it was time to fill our glasses.

"I was just thinking," he continued, "how useful it is to be the kind of detective I am. I mean of course an ex-policeman and quite ordinary sort of chap. None of your ritzy type with titles and private incomes. I'm a public bar man, and if I hadn't been I might never have cleared up the case I'm telling you about. I shouldn't have had the right friends, for one thing. I shouldn't have known old Dick Sowerby who was in charge of the left-luggage office at St. Watercross Station. However, I'll tell you the story as it happened."

He paused an instant, then went on: "Little Mumbo was a rich man. Charles Mumby, his real name was, and he was a perfect midget, tiny, but wonderfully proportioned. He'd appeared in the big American circuses and, in fact, all over the world. Five years before this happened, he had married an English girl called Nina, who was of normal size. Nothing unusual about that, I'm told. Midgets marry non-midgets more often than not, and Nina was a lovely girl. They were described by everyone who knew them as a most devoted couple.

"They organized their lives very cleverly so that Mumbo's midgetism shouldn't embarrass either of them. Fortunately, they were rich enough to be able to do this. They had a flat in London and a house down at Southbourne, and although neither of them could drive a car they had a chauffeur and a big limousine with a seat specially put in for the little fellow.

"I was coming up from Southbourne myself on an early train which was non-stop to London when this thing happened. Gave me a nasty shock, I can tell you. I had only just moved to that empty carriage and had not even noticed the luggage rack. Little Mr. Mumbo was dead as a doornail, but I recognized him at once. Before I pulled the communication cord or anything I made a quick examination of his body to see if I could find the cause of his death. There was a lot of bandaging over the left shoulder, which made me think —and the doctors proved later I was right—that he'd been stabbed there. Quickest way down to the heart, you know. It didn't need much of a blade to reach his heart, poor little fellow. Someone had done it with one easy blow. But it hadn't gone through his clothes. He had been bandaged and dressed again after he was dead.

"When we got into London there was the devil's own fuss over that corpse. Police, ambulance, everything in no time, it seemed. I was quite impressed. The reporters were on the station in a very short while and looking for the man who had found the body. But I wasn't interested in telling my story then. I wanted to find out first who had done it. So what did I do?"

Beef loved a rhetorical question, but I knew better than to try to answer it and shook my head in feigned bewilderment.

"I watched to see whether anyone had come to meet him. No one else thought of that. They were all too busy trying to get a glimpse of the corpse. I was rewarded, all right. I saw an anxious-looking girl standing at the barriers long after all the passengers had gone and staring down the platform.

" 'Excuse,' I said. 'Were you by any chance expecting Mr. Charles Mumby?'

" 'Yes! Yes! Where is he?' She sounded near hysteria already and I wondered how I was going to break it to her. 'I'm his wife.'

" 'I've got some bad news for you,' I said. 'Better come and sit down while I tell you.' It was just as well I did that because she would have fainted clean away if she'd been standing up when I told her what had happened. As it was, she gave a sort of half-scream and then started to cry. I just sat there and waited, feeling pretty bad myself, because there was nothing much a stranger could do in the circumstances.

"Presently she pulled herself together and began to tell me what had happened. Mumbo had been down at Southbourne on his own for a few days. Nothing unusual in that, she said. He liked being alone sometimes and had rooms there which were fitted up to make everything easy for him. She had stayed in town and had meant to join him today, but yesterday evening she had received a phone call from him asking her to meet the nine-eighteen train at S. Watercross Station in London next morning.

"He had sounded a little upset, she thought, but when she asked if anything was the matter he had said 'no' cheerfully enough. 'I wasn't really worried,' she said. 'Charles often changed his mind. I did rather wonder why he had not come up by car, because he had it down there, and Seboys, our chauffeur. But I just came to meet the train as he said and it wasn't until he didn't appear that I began to fret. There was one strange thing, though. Seboys was on that train this morning.'

"Of course that interested me. Seboys had been one of the first to pass the barrier and had spoken to Mrs. Mumby, explaining that the car had broken down and he had come up to get a spare

part. He hadn't noticed Mr. Mumby on the train, he said, but as he had hurried on at the last moment this was not surprising. He had not waited then.

" 'Did you see anyone else you knew get off the train?' I asked her.

"She hesitated over that, then said very quietly that she thought, only *thought,* mind you, that she had recognized Percy Mumby, Charles's brother. She was not sure, because she had not seen Percy for years. He was of normal size—Charles had been the only midget in his family—and 'not much good,' to quote her exact words. If ever he came near his little brother it was because he wanted to borrow money. Nina had seen him at their wedding and once since, she thought. What he was doing on that train she couldn't imagine. So, of course, I sent her to the police with the whole of her story. I had no lawful right to keep evidence of that sort to myself. A public bar man must hold to his canons.

"You should have seen the newspapers that day. I've never seen such headlines for a murder case. 'Little Mumbo Murdered,' they said, or 'Midget Slain on Southbourne Express.' It caused the biggest stir in crime for years and years. But I still kept out of it. 'A passenger discovered the body,' was the way the news stories phrased it, and I left it at that. I was biding my time."

Again Beef paused, this time to pick his teeth.

"It was a horrible case," he reflected. "Far more horrible than it may appear. I thought I could see daylight, but I couldn't be sure yet. There was just one thing which had given me certain suspicions, one bit of inconsistency, I suppose you'd call it. I've told it to you, but I don't suppose you've noticed it. It wasn't much to go on, but it had made me think. Then when I heard that Percy Mumby had been on that train and was Suspect Number One to the police, I decided to find him.

"He was in a terribly jumpy state. Living in a little Bloomsbury hotel expecting to be arrested any minute. He *had* been down to see his brother; he had been given some money and even been told that he would inherit a large sum under Charles Mumby's will. He hadn't known that his brother was on the same train that morning and he had traveled on it by sheer coincidence. But I could see he did not expect ever to convince anyone of that.

" 'I don't believe you did it, Mr. Mumby,' I told him.

" 'Why not?' he asked at once.

" 'Because I think I know who did.'

"We talked it over for some time and in the end he agreed to retain my services. I was to get

evidence to prove my suspect guilty and if I was successful he would pay my fee. If I wasn't he would probably be hanged a pauper, so I should not get it. I've taken on cases like that before.

"The first thing I did was to go down to Southbourne. I got permission to look through the Mumby home there, but found nothing of any interest at all. I had not expected to, really. I could see by now that this was a cleverly planned murder and that the guilty party was not one to leave spare clues lying about. Then I interviewed the ticket-collector at Southbourne Station who had been on duty at the entrance that morning.

"Just as I thought, he was ready to swear that Little Mumbo had not come through his barrier. How could he have helped noticing him? he asked. Yes, there had been lots of children, babes in arms, and a couple of perambulators for the goods' van. But no midgets. I came back to London feeling all the more sure that I was on the right track.

"The police had got several new suspects, I gathered, including a man who had been confined in a mental home for some time and was on the train that morning and another man who had once worked for Little Mumbo as a dresser and could give no satisfactory account of his movements at the relevant times. The dead midget's will might have been drafted to increase their confusion. True, the bulk of the money went to the widow. But the brother, the chauffeur and the dresser were all left sums large enough to provide a motive.

"It looked as though I was stumped for lack of evidence. And very soon Percy Mumby was arrested and charged with murder, and I knew I had to act quickly. It was then that my friendship with old Dick Sowerby came in useful. We'd played many a game of darts together at the Unicorn, a little pub round the back of the station, and old Dick, a quiet, steady chap, gray as a badger and stooping a bit, was as trustworthy as any man I knew.

"I waited until we'd won a couple of games together, then I told him what I wanted to do. At first he shook his head and said it would lose him his job. But I managed to talk him round. That evening, when he was on duty alone in the left-luggage office, I went across there, and we turned up the register.

"I suppose you've guessed what I was looking for? I wanted to examine any bag or parcel left on the morning of my discovery of the murder. According to my theory there had to be one, and, sure enough, there was. All the other bags left there had been collected except a little case which was small enough for any-

one to have carried. It was locked, but only with the ordinary kind of small key and we soon had it open.

"And when old Dick saw what was inside, even he let out a whistle and stood staring down at it. A baby's clothes! Then I turned them over and realized that I really was in luck because there was something else which I'd scarcely hoped to find. It was a Commando knife; one of the early models made by the Wilkinson Sword Company.

"I left Dick Sowerby there and rushed off to the Yard, so that within an hour they had collected the bag and handed the knife over to the fingerprint boys. By ten o'clock next morning Nina Mumby had been charged with the murder of her husband and I was holding a sort of press conference, and feeling more like an American president than an English police sergeant.

"Plain as a pikestaff, of course. She'd had enough of being married to that little freak. She'd worked it out nicely. Waited till he was alone at Southbourne and she alone in London with no one to know their movements at either end. She'd gone down there the night before with everything ready and stabbed Little Mumbo in his bath that morning.

"I don't suppose he bled much, poor little fellow, and it was all carried away by the bathwater. Then she staunched the wound and fixed it up with a bandage and dressed him in his ordinary clothes first and covered him with baby clothes over the top, seeing that his face was out of sight. She found a carriage to herself on the train, which was not very difficult because people avoid traveling with babies, and in any case that train from Southbourne is never very full on a morning early in the week.

"All she had to do then was to whip off the baby clothes and leave him on the rack rolled in sacking, as he was when I found him. She had a first-class ticket, I daresay, and when she had stuffed the baby clothes into her case she went along the corridor near the front of the train. Then, one of the first off, she had time to take her case to the left-luggage office and be back at the barrier, an anxious wife waiting for her husband.

"Really she took very few chances. A mother with a baby at Southbourne would not be noticed sufficiently to be identified afterwards, and certainly no London ticket-collector is going to be aware that she had passed through and come back to meet the train. As soon as the talk and trouble was over she would have come and reclaimed her case, which would have attracted no attention in the meantime. After

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the phonograph murder

by . . . Helen Reilly

There's a quite terrifying web of winding between the setting of a clock, and a wife killer's slow walk to the electric chair.

GEORGE BONFIELD made up his mind on the night that the maid, Hannah Swenson, came to the door of the bedroom and told him that the thermostatic control on the electric clock on the stove was out of order.

Bonfield and his wife were alone in the first-floor bedroom of the house in West Thirteenth Street which they owned and in which they had lived for the thirty years since their marriage. At fifty-six George Bonfield was a slight, wiry man with a gentle face and thinning hair. Louise Bonfield had put on flesh with the years but she had a shapely head, a fine profile, and rich blue-black hair that she wore fastened in a knot at the nape of her neck.

Louise was getting ready for bed. She had been threatened with an attack of gallstones and was still under the doctor's care. She always went to bed at around nine on the nights when George had to go to the office to work.

Louise was sitting on the edge

*Just what is the most vital ingredient of a good mystery story? In the lexicon of the experts the answer is a qualified noun—*mounting *suspense. But suspense quickly raised to the boiling point and maintained at that level is surely even more rarely miraculous. You'll find that quality in every terror-laden heartbeat of this almost unbearably exciting Inspector McKee yarn. Helen Reilly has written countless detective novels, but seldom has she given that most engaging sleuth the green light in a short story.*

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of the bed, taking off her shoes, and George was brushing his hair in front of the bureau. As Louise slipped off her stockings and folded them neatly, she said, "Dr. Seebold's a perfectly *wonderful* man, George. He says that if I'm careful I'm good for another twenty years."

Twenty years. The words did something to George Bonfield. He stared into the mirror and went on mechanically brushing his hair. Time was done up in bundles. There were fifty-two weeks in a year, seven days in a week, twenty-four hours in a day. And there would be twenty more years of it.

Louise said, "George, no matter how busy you are tomorrow, I want you to see the insurance people. In three months your endowment will mature, and we've got to begin to make definite plans about investing the money. I've got some very definite ideas."

George said, "Yes," obediently. Louise always did have definite ideas. She had had ideas about their daughter's first love affair, she had ideas about not buying the farm in Dutchess County, but putting his aunt's bequest into steel, she had had ideas about the serviceable dark wallpaper for the dining room.

Louise's voice flowed smoothly, inexorably. "Steel, perhaps, or aircraft, or maybe—" She went on, devouring his thirty thousand dollar endowment to the last crumb. "And, George, there's another thing I want to speak to you about."

She slipped a nightgown over her head. "That Randall account. Don't let it run another week. Either Randall pays or you take the matter to a lawyer. Does he think paper and time and layouts grow on trees? You've been culpably weak with him!"

She got into bed. The springs creaked. She settled herself on her pillows. "My magazine, there on the chair, hand it to me, George. I'm reading a lovely story." She sighed comfortably, and yawned.

"Yes, dear." George Bonfield gave her the magazine. As he did so his hand came in contact with hers. Her skin was soft and a little moist. He shivered, and fought down a sudden, sickening, soul-shaking wave of nausea.

He turned away, saying to himself with an odd quiver of surprise, "Why—why, I hate her."

There was a knock. The door opened and the maid, Hannah, stuck her head into the room. Hannah was a big, rawboned Swedish girl with a dish face and round blue eyes—not bright, and rather excitable, but willing and kind. Hannah said, "The electric clock on the stove. It won't work."

Louise spoke severely. "You

probably didn't set it properly, Hannah. Or you've been fooling with it. It worked all right this morning."

George said dully, "I'll have a look at it, Hannah."

Louise said, from her pillows, "Don't take too long, George; you've got a good night's work to do. Now, Hannah, remember, when you bring me my orange juice at eleven don't wake me, and be careful to see that the front door is bolted before you go to bed. Mr. Bonfield will ring when he gets home, and you can let him in."

"Yes, ma'am," the maid said.

George followed her out of the room. The front door was an old point of issue between himself and Louise. Servants objected, and rightly, to being dragged down from the top of the house in the middle of the night to let him in. The bolt and chain were not necessary. There was a perfectly good lock on the door. Bolts and bars . . . He shivered again. Suddenly they surrounded him.

He went downstairs and examined the electric clock. It was then, as he stood beside the stove in the kitchen, that the idea came to him. He fingered the clock. It was an interesting device. He began swinging the dials.

"Will we have to call the stove people, Mr. Bonfield?" Hannah said.

George Bonfield said slowly—and his voice seemed to come from a long distance away—"No, Hannah. I can fix it tomorrow. I'm—rather good with my hands."

He stared down at them for a long moment, got his hat, and left the house.

His office was on the second floor of a building on West Forty-second Street. It consisted of a waiting room, another room where Joe Tyler and the two stenographers worked, and George's own room beyond. His advertising agency was small and unpretentions, but it did a good pedestrian business that brought in a steady profit.

As usual on the nights they worked, Joe Tyler was waiting for him. Tyler was a big, eager giant with an enormous admiration for his boss. George said hello to Joe, gave him the copy for the radiator folders, went into his office, closed the door, and settled down in the chair behind the desk. He made no attempt to get at the remainder of the outline. George had much more important things to think about.

There was no danger of his being interrupted: Joe wouldn't dream of opening the door while his boss was engaged in creative endeavor. George smiled bitterly. He was about to embark on a creation of another kind.

That was on October the ninth. At the beginning of the

following week, George Bonfield bought the clock. It wasn't an electric clock. It was a simple, cheap alarm clock with a bell on the top.

He had an appointment that day with a client in Newark. The client's office was on Broad Street. There were plenty of drugstores on Broad Street, but he didn't buy the clock in any of them. He bought it in Jersey City. Bonfield put the clock in the bottom drawer of the desk in his office. He locked the drawer.

His next purchase, which required more care as it could be traced more easily, was a small portable phonograph. He had to wait to acquire this. Yet he couldn't wait too long. The endowment, the thirty thousand dollars to which he had looked forward for so long, was due in less than a month; and it was going to take time to get things exactly right.

Five days after he bought the alarm clock, his opportunity came. An old client of his in New England telegraphed from Boston asking George to come up for a promotion conference. Louise grumbled mildly, and redoubled her instructions to Hannah about locking the house at night and keeping small boys away from the front steps in the daytime.

George was away two days. It was on the morning of the second day that he stopped on his way to the station at a store he had already located and bought the small phonograph in the neat, unobtrusive blue case. He deposited the phonograph, carefully wrapped in brown paper in the checkroom in Grand Central on his way to the office from the train. Joe Tyler mustn't see it.

Red Lytell sent George tickets for the football game at the stadium on Saturday afternoon. Under the plea of work to be finished, Bonfield gave the tickets to a grateful Joe and, the faithful assistant safely disposed of, retrieved the phonograph from Grand Central. On the way back to the office, he stopped at a crowded five-and-ten and bought four balls of cord of various strengths and thicknesses.

The office was deserted. Once he got a fright when a cleaning woman tried to gain entrance by the door leading from his room directly into the hall, but he remained quiet. As the door was locked from the inside, the woman presently went away. Removing the bell from the alarm clock and placing the phonograph on the desk, Bonfield experimented with all four varieties of cord until five o'clock. There was a queer little thread of exultation running through him as he put the alarm clock, phonograph, and cord into the bottom drawer.

He locked the drawer and went home.

Louise was more trying than usual that night. She had sent back the shirts he had chosen for himself and had bought him others of her own choosing. Over pickles and cold beef, she said, "Don't pick and choose, my dear. Eat the fat; fat's good for you. Those other shirts were far too bright, George, and the material was too thin. What did the insurance people say?"

When he told her that everything was in order as far as the endowment was concerned, she spent the rest of the evening calculating percentages until she went to bed at nine. She required a good deal of sleep. It was George who tiptoed into the bedroom at eleven that night with the glass of orange juice she sipped whenever she happened to wake up during the night.

It was Hannah's day off. Louise insisted that orange juice gave her a wonderful throat, warded off coughs and colds. He tiptoed out of the room and examined the windows and the front door before he went to bed himself.

Twice that week, when Joe was away from the office and the stenographers had left, George put the experiment into operation again, deciding finally on a thin white string that had the proper tensile strength. It was a delicate operation. Too much slack wouldn't do, and too little might break the string. That mustn't happen.

He had two purchases still to make. One, the glass cutter, was insignificant. He bought it at a hardware store in Brooklyn. The other purchase, on which success depended, was more difficult. He must never by any chance be connected with it. The Rosy Cheek Tomato people supplied him with the opportunity to procure it.

Late in the month, he went to Philadelphia to see about some trade paper displays. That attended to he sought a shop that handled radios and phonographs. There was the usual row of booths where you could try records out. You could also have your own voice recorded.

George had a record made of his voice. He left the shop with the small disc in his briefcase.

Nothing remained but the spadework and the question of getting rid of the various implements safely. That took a good deal of figuring. The time would be short and the implements mustn't be tied to him in any way. But they were innocent in themselves and, deposited separately, ought to arouse no suspicion in a city as big as New York.

His endowment was due in two weeks. The time for action was approaching. He had calculated minutes and distances to

a hair, traveling to and from work on the Eighth instead of the Seventh Avenue subway. He had studied the various streets at night, weighing the hazards he might have to encounter.

The time for action came. Everything was in readiness. The annuity was due on Saturday. He had a choice of Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. His client, Frank Morrison, vice-president of Darling Soaps, would have suited equally well on anyone of the three. George chose Thursday on account of the weather. The forecast for Thursday was "cloudy and colder tonight, rain tomorrow." At two in the afternoon the sun was still shining.

George Bonfield controlled his nervousness. At four the sun went behind the clouds. At six, when he went home on the Seventh Avenue subway, it was raining and he was in despair. Actual rain would be even more fatal than a clear, starlit night. To his relief, the rain stopped at around seven.

Louise talked steadily during dinner. Her voice slashed at his ears. He made himself look at her, made himself answer, keeping his voice normal and indifferent. She showed no surprise when he told her he had to go back to the office. He explained that Morrison of Darling Soaps wanted the material for a new campaign by morning, and that he might be late.

Louise said, "Don't make a noise coming home, and if it's wet out be sure and take off your rubbers before Hannah lets you in."

"Yes, dear." George Bonfield didn't look at his wife. He turned away, picked up his hat, and walked out into the hall.

Back at the office on the second floor of the building in West Forty-second Street, Joe was waiting for him. Bonfield laid out the evening's work. "You'll have to keep at these folders, Joe. Morrison is in a hurry. We've got to get them finished tonight. I'll get busy with the front material. It's tricky stuff, so don't disturb me and don't let me be disturbed."

Joe said cheerfully, "I'll keep at it, Mr. Bonfield."

Bonfield went into his office and closed the door. He locked it, as he sometimes did when he wanted to remain uninterrupted. He had to run the risk of a question from Joe about the copy, but he had gone over the folders carefully and there should be no questions. He had spent three solid hours the previous night completing the entire Darling Soap campaign to the last dot and dash. He locked the door leading into the hall. That was at 9:20.

The period of waiting was the hardest. He didn't dare walk around because he was supposed to be engrossed in the papers on

his desk. Once he heard Joe approach the water cooler, but Joe didn't come near the inner office.

At 9:55 Bonfield opened the bottom drawer of the desk and took out the alarm clock, minus bell, the phonograph in the blue case, and the record. He adjusted the string the set the clock. At 10:02 he left the inner office silently, by way of the door opening directly on the corridor. He locked this door behind him with his key and glanced quickly up and down the hall. He went down the fire stairs and emerged cautiously into the lower hall. The watchman ought to be in the basement.

George Bonfield's heart stood still at the sound of approaching footsteps. Ten feet separated him from the front door. If he was seen now, everything would be ruined. He held his breath. The footsteps receded.

Out in the cold night air, he wiped the sweat from his forehead and pulled the second hat with which he had provided himself lower over his eyes. It was a green hat which some customer had left in his office months before. His own hat and topcoat were in the outer office. He made his way swiftly to the Eighth Avenue subway, head down, collar turned up around his throat. Pedestrians were scarce. But it wasn't raining. He kept glancing up at the sky anxiously.

He got off the downtown express at Fourteenth Street. The house in which he lived was on the south side of Thirteenth, but there was an alley from Twelfth leading into the bowels of the block. He entered the alley noiselessly.

He paused near the clothes-dryer and surveyed the house. It was dark except for a light high up on the roof, the skylight over Hannah's room. He went up the path to the back door. The wind swayed the ailanthus and sent leaves fluttering down. He must be careful afterward about those leaves.

The glass cutter was in his pocket. So was the tape. He put his gloves on and attached the tape to a pane in the rear door. He cut the pane carefully and, with the aid of the tape, lifted it clear without noise. He put in his gloved hand and turned the key. He opened the door, stepped into the kitchen and listened. There wasn't a sound. He crept into the narrow front hall and went to the front door. He took the chain off and unlocked the door. Holding himself tightly, every nerve taut, he tiptoed toward Louise's bedroom.

It was 10:24. When George Bonfield entered his house by the rear door. It was 10:35 with a half minute added when he left the house by the same route. He was back in his office at 10:53.

He took off the green hat and

shook it. There were no leaf fragments on his shoes. He hung the hat in the closet and looked with dull wonder at his face in the mirror. He massaged his eyeballs, and listened. Yes, Joe was at work; the typewriter was clicking along evenly. He rustled a paper on his own desk. A horrible inertia possessed him.

He took the alarm clock, the record, and the phonograph from the desk, and again left his office. The lavatory was at the back of the building in the middle of a long hall. All the other offices were dark. He moved as rapidly as he could. He smashed the record into small pieces and disposed of them through a window in the middle of the corridor.

The alarm clock he got rid of through the window at the northern end, waiting until the jangling of a passing truck concealed the noise of its fall. This done, he proceeded to the other end of the hall. Opening the window there, he leaned out. Holding the phonograph well away from the wall, he gave it a swing and let it fall into the deep crevice between the buildings.

For a moment, as the neat blue case disappeared from sight, he wondered whether his disposition of the three objects had been wise. He shrugged his doubts away and returned to his office. Assembling the scattered sheets of the Darling Soap campaign already prepared, he settled down to wait.

It was 11:12 when the call went into the precinct. The call was made by Mr. Gamble who lived next door to the Bonfields. Promptly at eleven Mr. Gamble was roused by piercing screams issuing from the red-brick house next to his own. He rushed out, a coat thrown hastily over his pajamas, and found Hannah Swenson, the maid, shrieking at the top of her lungs at the Bonfield front door. He pushed her aside and ran along the hall. One glance was enough for Gamble. The police arrived within a few minutes.

They found Louise Bonfield lying on the floor of the bedroom. She had been struck over the head with a heavy brass candlestick from the mantel. She had also been choked. There were purplish areas on her plump throat. The room was in disorder. The desk drawers had been pulled out and their contents scattered. A beaded purse, empty, had been thrown down on a chair.

The police discovered the pane of glass that had been removed from the back door. A brass clock had fallen from the mantel. The glass had smashed, and the hands had stopped at 10:35.

The maid, Hannah Swenson, was interrogated. At best none

too bright, she was a wreck, but the police managed to gather, from a story interrupted by moans and shudders and fresh outbursts of weeping, an approximation of what had happened.

Hannah Swenson had discovered her mistress' body at 11:00 when she entered the room with the glass of orange juice that she prepared for Mrs. Bonfield every night. The maid, coming down the back stairs to get the orange juice ready, must have been heard by the killer after he had done his dreadful work and while he was rifling the desk. His escape through the door at the back of the house was cut off by Hannah. He had fled through the front door.

The medical examiner arrived, took one look at the wildly laughing Hannah, and ordered her to St. Vincent's for the night, where she could receive proper care. The West Side precinct sent detectives around to notify the husband, and the investigation continued . . .

In his inner office on the second floor of the building on Forty-second Street, George Bonfield heard the tramp of approaching feet as two big men came down the corridor. There was a murmur of voices in the other room, and Joe Tyler's shocked cry. The door opened.

George Bonfield was not an actor. It was one of the things that had worried him. He found he had no occasion to worry. The blood left his heart, and his legs gave way under him at the first sight of the law. But the detectives were considerate, and he recovered himself.

Bonfield returned with the detectives to the house on Thirteenth Street. Hannah Swenson was already gone.

He steeled himself when he was asked to make a formal identification of his wife. The bedroom was full of big men, some in uniform, some not. Flash bulbs went off, and there was a lot of noise. Everyone was very nice to Bonfield. "If you'll step this way, sir?" Two attendants from the morgue were standing at either end of a long wicker basket.

George walked slowly toward it. He looked down at Louise. Her eyes were closed. Hair veiled the bruises on her temple, and folds of linen obscured her injured throat.

He said in a whisper, "Yes, that's my wife." He stepped back, and the basket was borne away.

A tall, slender man in loose gray tweeds, with cavernous brown eyes deeply set in the sockets of a fine head, entered the room accompanied by a stenographer. The newcomer was Inspector Christopher McKee of the Manhattan Homicide Squad. The inspector listened to the precinct men, and read the

maid's testimony. He spoke only once to George Bonfield.

"You were at your office all evening, Mr. Bonfield?" McKee asked.

George Bonfield said, "Yes," and an icy shiver went through him. He waited. The tall man nodded and turned away.

It wasn't until the next morning at nine that Bonfield was questioned in detail. He knew it had to come. Joe Tyler was with him at the time. Joe had come to see if he could be of assistance.

Inspector McKee was there, together with two or three detectives. They asked Bonfield to step into the bedroom with them. Bonfield forced himself to show emotion—but not too much. It was the lieutenant from the local precinct who took charge. He explained the situation.

"The way we figure it, Mr. Bonfield, is that your wife was killed by a burglar who entered this room without realizing it was a bedroom. His intention was evidently to rob. Your wife surprised him. He snatched the candlestick from the mantel, knocking down the clock as he did so. He was searching the desk when the maid surprised him. His retreat by the way he had entered the house was cut off. He made his escape by the front door. Now, about this desk—"

George Bonfield cleared his throat. He said that wife kept money in the beaded purse. She had no jewelry, and her stock certificates and other valuables were in a safe-deposit box at the bank.

"Now, you yourself, Mr. Bonfield? You'll understand that this is just routine. We will also have to question the maid further when she's well enough. It's simply to get a complete picture of the case. Will you tell us exactly what you did last night?"

It had come, as he knew it must come—a circle of men, eyes fastened on him intently. George Bonfield crossed one knee over the other and began to talk. It was hard to keep his voice level and unhurried. The deadly fatigue which weighed him down was a help. Every time he had tried to fall asleep he had kept on seeing Louise's face.

"My wife and I had dinner at around half past seven and, as usual on the nights I work, I left the house at around half past eight. I had a lot of work to do." He described the campaign for the Darling Soap people. "After I left, I presume Louise did what she generally did: went to bed early."

"Were you alone in your office?"

"My assistant, Joe Tyler, was in the next room."

The detective brought Joe Tyler in. Joe corroborated Bonfield's testimony. He said that

Mr. Bonfield entered his office at around 8:45 and that he was there until the police arrived. Joe was in the next room every single minute of the time, and he couldn't be mistaken.

The lieutenant said unexpectedly, "There's a door opening directly into the corridor from your office, isn't there, Mr. Bonfield?"

Bonfield knew all about that door, knew what they were thinking about it, and had prepared himself. He said quietly, "Yes, there's a door there. You mean you think I—?"

Joe Tyler sprang to his defense. Joe said excitedly, "Mrs. Bonfield was killed at ten thirty-five, wasn't she, Lieutenant? That's what it said in the paper —on account of the clock."

The lieutenant nodded.

"Then I can prove that Mr. Bonfield was in his office," Joe said. "I heard him moving around before that and after that, but at ten thirty-five he called Frank Morrison to tell him that the material would be ready in the morning. I heard him."

Bonfield was careful to keep his attitude and posture listless while the lieutenant put Joe through his paces as to memory, exactitude, and further details. Joe said, "Sure, I remember the time. I remember it because we still had a lot of work to do. I knew Mr. Bonfield was worried about it, too, and I figured when I heard him say to Mr. Morrison, 'It's ten thirty-five now; another two hours and we'll have it licked. I'll have everything ready for you by morning,' that we still had a hell of a lot to do."

Obviously Bonfield couldn't have murdered his wife in the house on Thirteenth Street a minute or two after he made a telephone call from his office on West Forty-second Street. The conclusion was written on the faces surrounding him.

After a few purely routine questions about the house, the doors and windows, and the back yard, the police thanked him and took their departure.

An enormous weight fell from George Bonfield's shoulders. They didn't suspect him—could not suspect him on the evidence. They were very thorough. They had examined the maid's room, examined the office. They had gone through Bonfield's desk, and found everything in order. They had looked into the closet and seen the spare green hat. He had explained that it was a hat some customer had left there months before. They hadn't examined the crevices between the buildings, and the phonograph and the alarm clock had remained undiscovered.

Bonfield's nerves steadied. He was safe. For the first time in weeks, he permitted himself to relax. He knew there would be more red tape to be gone

through, so he wasn't surprised or worried when he was summoned to the office of the head of the Manhattan Homicide Squad at four o'clock on the following afternoon.

There were half a dozen men in the room. Inspector McKee was seated behind a desk. Bonfield's statement had been taken down in shorthand, and typewritten copies of it were lying in front of the inspector.

"Sorry to bring you here, Mr. Bonfield," McKee said pleasantly, "but there are certain formalities. We'll want you to sign these statements in a moment or two. I'm expecting a report on Mr. Morrison. As soon as we receive it, we won't need to bother you further."

The door opened, and a detective came in. He said, "It's okay, Inspector. I just talked to Morrison of Darling Soaps. He said that Mr. Bonfield called him at ten thirty-five. Mr. Bonfield said that he was within two hours of finishing the job, and that he'd have the stuff complete by morning."

A little rustle went through the room. George settled himself in his chair. He felt larger. A new strength flowed through his blood. The world expanded. It was a wide, wide world. There was nothing he had neglected, nothing he hadn't foreseen. He had been very careful.

"Mr. Bonfield, if you'll just sign your name to these?" The inspector pushed the statements toward him.

Bonfield had the pen in his hand when the door opened again. It was only Hannah—big, stupid Hannah. He didn't really need her. All she could do was hammer home the points that had already been established. He listened idly while the inspector took her, step by step, over the ground he himself knew so well. Hannah described the preparation of the orange juice at the usual time, her awful discovery when she entered the bedroom.

"And then what did you do?" the inspector asked.

"I screamed. I threw open the window, and then I ran to the front door and unlocked it and ran out."

The inspector looked at her. He said, patiently, "But Hannah, you couldn't have unlocked the front door at eleven o'clock. It was *already* unlocked. The murderer took the chain off and unlocked the door when he fled after killing Mrs. Bonfield at ten thirty-five."

"I don't care," Hannah persisted stolidly. "I did unlock the door after I ran out of the bedroom. It was locked up tight when I found her."

Bonfield swallowed noisily. The crazy idiot! Of course, the door was unlocked when she got downstairs at a little before elev-

en. He had unlocked it with his own hands when he first entered the house at 10:24. Every moment of that interval was burned into his brain. The stupid, blundering fool! Had she lost her mind? There was a red gauze in front of his eyes. Time and place disappeared, and there was only the necessity of getting Hannah to tell the truth. He was on his feet. He heard his own voice shouting.

"The door *was* unlocked when you got downstairs. I know because I—"

He stopped. Everything stopped. He was impaled on a bright steel hook in a vacuum of silence. The inspector was looking at him. So were the other men in the room.

The inspector spoke softly. "You know the door was unlocked because— Go on, Mr. Bonfield."

Bonfield licked dry lips. He couldn't go on, because there was no place to go. He had been so careful. It was such a little slip—and so utterly damning. Louise had beaten him in the end. He wasn't really surprised. But it was no use struggling any longer. He was exhausted. Blood pounded in his temples.

"Yes, I killed her," he said dully. He buried his face in his shaking hands.

Later that afternoon McKee had a conference with the district attorney. There was little to explain. George Bonfield had signed a confession.

"This," McKee said, "is what Bonfield did on the night of the killing: He went to his office on Forty-second Street and into his own inner room. His clerk Joe Tyler, was in the outside room. When the time came, Bonfield arranged his contraption. It consisted of an alarm clock, a phonograph, and a record of his own voice. He set the alarm for ten thirty-five. He attached one end of a string to the clapper and the other end to the lever of the phonograph. Then he left the office, went down to Thirteenth Street, and killed his wife.

"He killed her, not at ten thirty-five—the smashed clock was a blind—but at around ten twenty-five. That done, he staged a fake robbery, and then called the soap man, Morrison, over the telephone in his wife's room at about ten thirty-four. Meanwhile, in his empty office, the clapper tripped the phonograph lever, the record revolved, and Joe Tyler listened to the identical telephone call, word for word, that Bonfield was then making from the house on Thirteenth Street. It was a perfect alibi."

"I'll say," the district attorney agreed. "Tell me, McKee, did you suspect Bonfield before he broke?"

The inspector shrugged. "The absence of fingerprints on the telephone in the Bonfield wom-

an's bedroom looked queer. Someone had wiped it carefully for no apparent reason." He shrugged again. "I don't believe we would ever have got him, except for Mrs. Bonfield—and the wind."

The district attorney frowned. "Mrs. Bonfield?"

"Mrs. Bonfield trained Hannah well. The maid was terrified of her. Lying in bed and listening to the wind, Hannah began worrying about the front door—whether or not she had locked it. Finally she couldn't stand it any longer. At not quite ten thirty she crept down to the lower hall, found the door unlocked, locked it, put the chain on, and went back upstairs. She remained there until ten fifty-five, when it was time to get the orange juice ready. While she was in the lower hall, locking the door, she didn't hear Bonfield and he did not hear her. The house is pretty stout, and the wind was high."

The inspector reached moodily for his hat. "It's all yours, Counselor—and you're welcome to it. If I were on the jury, I'd bring in a strong recommendation for mercy. Maybe you can do something about it. Poor devil!" McKee walked out of the room.

MURDER IN MINIATURE *(Concluded from page 124)*

she had left me at the station she probably went home to arrange that her bed should look slept in before her charwoman came to the flat. It was a neat, workmanlike job and she might have got away with it if I hadn't noticed one very odd thing."

"And that?" I asked, since the question was only too clearly expected of me.

"Why, that she was there at all," said Beef. "At the barrier, I mean. All the passengers had long since left the train, as I told you. If she had genuinely expected her husband she would have supposed that he missed his train or something ten minutes before. Only if she wanted to be seen there would she have waited till I found her. You might say her other mistake was to keep the knife, and certainly it was the most damning evidence at her trial. I don't see how she could have got rid of it before, though. If it had all gone according to plan she need never have worried. But how was she to know that I should be on the same train? That was *her* downfall!"

live and learn

by . . . R. E. Worth

To a man with enlightened ideas about education murder may be solely a matter of mathematics.

EDUCATION WAS the death of Aunt Clare—that and her unfailing generosity. Although a wealthy and talented woman, she had always regretted her lack of what she called "a good solid schooling." Ruth—my orphaned first cousin, and foster sister by adoption—and I had been thrust upon Aunt Clare as children when my parents died, and she was determined that we should have everything that she had missed—whether we liked it or not.

And so it began, this unwitting investment in her own death.

First, the very best kindergarten, then an exclusive away-from-home school and finally university for us both. And all the time it gave her pleasure to finance her whim with absurdly large allowances, special treats and little bribes and favors.

University was the most pleasurable windfall while it lasted. For both of us it meant a minimum of work and a maximum of entertainment that must have taxed even Aunt Clare's apparently limitless financial resources.

No one could claim that in the

Here in chilling, miniscule format is a crime mystery so startlingly candid that it may seem at first glance to be no mystery at all. But you're sure to devote more than a "first glance" to characters so absorbing. And you'll quickly come to see that the most terrifying of mysteries is wickedness itself.

end we failed to justify her investment in us. Ruth got her degree in science, and I in mathematics.

It was only natural, then, that we should feel that Aunt Clare was being a trifle ungrateful when she deprived us of our allowance and seriously expected us to work for our living. Despite our protests she made it abundantly clear. Either we chose to be her honest and industrious heirs or we could be happily idle —and penniless.

But Aunt Clare's precious liberality had taught me one thing —besides an acute dislike for work. It had convinced me that a strong respect for the power of figures, especially five-figure bank balances such as hers, was a valuable stepping stone to success in my enlightened scheme of values.

It occurred to me in a moment of mathematical inspiration that my aunt's remaining one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, divided by two would equal long life and lasting luxury. An interesting equation, surely.

Ruth, of course, was no less eager to exercise her newly-acquired knowledge in a practical —and remunerative—way. With admirable scientific detachment, she produced a formula ingeniously involving the height of the stairs at Aunt Clare's, the speed at which a falling body travels— when suitably propelled—and an amazing little treatise called *The Fragility of the Cranium in Wealthy Ladies of Advancing Years.*

And so it was.

The staircase provided the necessary height, Ruth and I the propulsion, and Aunt Clare's frail but vexingly long-lived frame the falling body.

She died with satisfying accuracy, and a little squeak of wonderment at the scope of modern education.

The maid, Nora, still dewy-eyed from her customary Thursday afternoon off with Gregory Peck, found our late Aunt Clare barely half an hour before Ruth and I returned from our customary afternoon walk.

The inquest was mercifully brief.

A naive county coroner tried to combine the necessary impartiality with an appropriate expression of sympathy. He erred heavily on the side of sympathy. County coroners usually do.

Our friend the local doctor gave evidence about the unsteadying effect of Aunt Clare's arthritis and Nora, blaming herself pitifully, was sure she had noticed a worn patch in the stair carpet some days before.

Ruth and I, suitably grieved of course, gave our mutually agreed-upon alibi of the afternoon walk, but somehow carelessly omitted to mention the painstakingly authentic wear the

carpet had received for the past month.

The verdict of "accidental death" was, I felt, more than a mere formality. It was a last tribute to Aunt Clare's justifiable belief in the merits of modern education.

Our dutiful period of mourning was somewhat relieved by the discreet news that as our aunt's sole heirs we were not only clever, but wealthy.

All this occurred some six months ago, and ever since I have been making a further study of the mathematics of inheritance—as befits a gentleman of leisure. It now occurs to me that the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars not divided at all equals greater luxury for a much longer period of time.

Poor Ruth! She displayed such authentic sorrow at the death of her dear aunt that it should be no problem at all to persuade her to join her by means of a tragic —but carefully calculated—suicide. The grief will have upset her mental balance.

I won't deny that I shall miss her coldly scientific assistance. I really believe she had a flair for this sort of thing.

Anyway, she's such a wretched housekeeper that now that the servants have left, I shall be pleased to spend a little of her share of the money on a good cook. The poor girl should really have studied cookery instead of physics and chemistry.

Even the tea she makes tastes as bitter as . . . *Bitter!* Oh, my God! Chemistry!

Mr. and Mrs. Peter Duluth, whose sleuthing talents are widely famous, solve a big top murder by picking red roses of direful omen.

MURDER WITH FLOWERS

By Q. PATRICK

A beloved humorist forsakes the Inimitable Jeeves for stark criminality with the eeriest of detective mystery yarns.

THE HARMONICA MYSTERY

By P. G. WODEHOUSE

the indiscretion of letty shaw

by . . . E. Phillips Oppenheim

Murder in London may wear a garb as mysterious as the fog-wrapped night, or a child's startled outcry.

WHEN LETTY SHAW made her first gossip-defying gesture, the general opinion was that she ought to have known better. When she entered the restaurant a few minutes before midnight, followed by Austen Abbott, a good half of the guests stared at her in incredulous disapproval.

Gustav himself conducted them to a small table laid for two, covered with pink roses, and handed his attractive client the menu of a specially-ordered supper. There was no gainsaying the fact that Letty and her escort proposed supping in style.

The Café at the Milan was without doubt the fashionable rendezvous of the moment for those ladies connected with the stage who, after their performance, had not the time or the inclination to make the conventional change to satin gloves and evening gowns with plunging waistlines.

Letty Shaw, being one of the brightest celebrities of the musical comedy stage, was well known to every one in the room. There was scarcely a person there who within the last fortnight

Few writers have more genuinely deserved the accolade "world-famous" than E. Phillips Oppenheim, for in the scintillating realm of mystery-intrigue none have excelled or perhaps ever will excel the author of THE GREAT IMPERSONATION. *Here is one of his most suspenseful stories, brilliantly told and featuring the resourceful Peter Ruff, a resident of New Baker Street.*

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had not had occasion to congratulate her upon her engagement to Captain the Honorable Brian Sotherst.

Sotherst was extremely wealthy, and one of the most popular young men about town. Letty Shaw, although she had had one or two harmless flirtations, was well known as a level-headed and hard-working young actress who loved her work and against whom no one had ever had a word to say.

Consequently, the shock was all the greater when, within a fortnight of her engagement, she was thus to be seen openly and defiantly dining with the most notorious Casanova in London—and a man towards whom Sotherst was known to have a special aversion. Nothing but a break with Sotherst or a fit of temporary insanity seemed to explain the situation.

Her best friend—who knew her and was contemptuous of all gossip, regarding it as a form of immaturity—rose to her feet and came sailing down the room. She nodded gaily to Abbott, whom she hated and whom she had not recognized for years, and laid her hand upon Letty's arm.

"Where's Brian?" she asked.

Letty shrugged her shoulders but it was not altogether a natural gesture. "On duty tonight," she answered.

Letty's friend paused for a moment. "Come over and join our party, both of you," she urged. "Dick Pennell's here and Grace Marsh. They've just landed. They'd love to meet you."

Letty shook her head slowly. There was a look in her face which even her friend did not understand. "I'm afraid we can't do that," she said. "I am Mr. Abbott's guest."

"And tonight," Austen Abbott said, looking up at the woman who stood between them, "I have no intention of sharing Miss Shaw with anybody."

Letty's friend could do no more than shake her head and go away. The two were left alone for the rest of the evening, and when they departed together people who knew felt that a harbinger of tragedy had passed through the room. Nobody understood—or pretended to understand. Even before her engagement Letty had never been known to deliberately court malicious slander. That she should do so now and with this particular man was preposterous!

"Something will come of it," her best friend murmured sadly as she watched Austen Abbott help his companion on with her cloak.

Something did!

Peter Ruff rose at his accustomed hour the following morning and attired himself, if possible, with more than his usual

care. He wore the gray suit which he had carefully put out the night before but he hesitated a considerable time between the rival appeals of a red tie with white spots, and a plain mauve one. He finally chose the latter, finding that it harmonized more satisfactorily with his socks, and after a final survey of himself in the looking-glass he entered the next room, where his coffee was set out upon a small round table near the fire, together with his letters and newspapers.

Peter Ruff was, after all, like the rest of us a creature of habit. He made an invariable rule of glancing through the newspapers before he paid any regard at all to his letters or his breakfast. In the absence of anything of a particularly sensational nature he then opened his letters in leisurely fashion, and went back afterwards to the newspaper as he finished his meal.

This morning, however, both his breakfast and letters remained for some time untouched. The first paragraph which caught his eye as he shook open the Daily Telegraph was sufficiently absorbing. There it was in great black type—

TERRIBLE TRAGEDY IN FLAT OF WELL-KNOWN ACTRESS! AUSTEN ABBOTT SHOT DEAD! ARREST OF CAPTAIN SOTHERST!

Beyond the inevitable shock which is always associated with the taking of life, and the unusual position of the people concerned in it, there was little in the brief account of the incident to excite the imagination.

A policeman on the pavement outside the flat in which Miss Shaw and her mother lived fancied that he heard, about two o'clock in the morning, the report of a revolver shot. As nothing further transpired and as the sound was very indistinct, he did not at once enter the building but kept it, as far as possible, under observation.

About twenty minutes later a young gentleman in evening dress came out into the street and the policeman noticed at once that he was carrying a small revolver, which he attempted to conceal. The constable thereupon whistled for his sergeant and accompanied by the young gentleman—who made no effort to escape—ascended to Miss Shaw's rooms.

There the body of Austen Abbott was discovered, lying upon the threshold of the sitting room with a small bullet mark through the forehead. The inmates of the house were aroused and a doctor sent for. The deceased man was identified as Austen Abbott—a well-known actor—and the man under arrest gave his name at once as Captain the Honorable Brian Sotherst.

Peter Ruff sighed as he laid

down the paper. The case seemed to him perfectly clear and his sympathies were altogether with the young officer who had taken the law into his own hands. He knew nothing of Miss Letty Shaw and consequently did her perhaps less than justice in his thoughts. Of Austen Abbott, on the other hand, he knew a great deal—and nothing good. It was absurd, after all, that anyone should be punished for killing such a man!

He descended a few minutes later to his office and found Miss Brown busy arranging a bowl of violets upon his desk.

"Isn't it horrible?" she cried as he entered, carrying a bundle of papers under his arm. "I never have had such a shock!"

"Do you know any of them?" Peter Ruff asked, straightening his tie in the mirror.

"Of course," she answered. "Why, I was in the same company with Letty Shaw for a year. I was at the Milan too last night. Letty was there having supper with Austen Abbott. We all said that there'd be trouble but of course we never dreamed of this! Isn't there any chance for him, Peter? Can't he get off?"

Peter Ruff shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he answered. "They may be able to bring evidence of a quarrel and reduce it to manslaughter but what you've just told me about this supper party makes it all the worse. It will come out in the evidence, of course."

"Captain Sotherst is such a kindly, decent sort," Miss Brown declared, "and so good-looking! And as for that Austen Abbott, he ought to have been shot long ago! He boasts openly of his affairs with married women—and girls too young to be aware of his viciousness."

Peter Ruff seated himself before his desk and hitched up his trousers at the knees.

"No doubt you are right, Violet," he said, "but people go about these things so foolishly. To me it is simply exasperating to reflect how little use is made of persons such as myself, whose profession in life it is to arrange these little matters. Take the present case, for example. Captain Sotherst had only to lay the facts before me and Austen Abbott would have stopped boasting. I could have arranged the affair for him in half-a-dozen different ways.

"Whereas now it must be a life for a life—the life of an honest, likeable young man for that of an unscrupulously amorous rascal who should have been kicked out of every drawing room in London long ago. I have some letters to give you, Violet, if you please."

She swung around in her chair reluctantly. "I can't help thinking of that poor young fellow," she said with a sigh.

"Sentiment after office hours, *if* you please!" said Peter.

Then there came a knock at the door . . .

His visitor lifted her veil and Peter Ruff recognized her immediately. "What can I do for you, Lady Mary?" he asked.

She saw the recognition in his eyes even before he spoke and wondered at it. "You know me?" she said.

"I know most people," he answered drily, "it is part of my profession."

"Tell me—you are Mr. Peter Ruff," she said, "the famous specialist in the detection of crime? You know that Brian Sotherst is my brother?"

"Yes," he said, "I know it! I am sorry—very sorry indeed."

He handed her a chair. She seated herself with a little tightening of the lips.

"I want more than sympathy from you, Mr. Ruff," she told him. "I want your help."

"It is my profession," he admitted, "but your brother's case makes intervention difficult, does it not?"

"You mean . . ." she began.

"Your brother does not deny his guilt, I understand."

"He has not denied it," she said. "Very likely he will not do so before the magistrate—but neither has he admitted it. Mr. Ruff, you are such a clever man. Can't you see the truth?"

Peter Ruff looked at her steadily for several moments. "Lady Mary," he said, "I can see what you are going to suggest. You are convinced that Austen Abbott was shot by Letty Shaw and that your brother is keeping silent to protect her."

"I am sure of it!" she declared. "The girl did it, beyond a doubt. Brian would never have shot anyone. He might have horse-whipped Abbott, perhaps even beaten him to death. But shot him in cold blood—never!"

"The provocation—" Ruff began.

"There was no provocation," she interrupted. "He was engaged to the girl and of course we hated it. But she was an honest little thing and devoted to him."

"Doubtless," Ruff said. "But all the same, as you will hear before the magistrates, or at the inquest, she was having supper with Austen Abbott last night at the Milan."

Lady Mary's eyes flashed. "I don't believe it!" she said. "And if she did—was that so awful?"

"With a man like Abbott it might have serious consequences," Peter Ruff said. "As to the fact of her dining with him—there is no shadow of doubt about it."

Lady Mary was staggered. For a few minutes she seemed struggling to rearrange her thoughts.

"You see," Ruff continued, "the fact that Miss Shaw was

willing to be seen by thirty or forty guests who knew her dining with Austen Abbott renders it most improbable that she should shoot him in her sitting room an hour or so later, and then go calmly up to her mother's room as though nothing had happened."

Lady Mary had lost some of her confidence, but she was not daunted. "Even if we have been deceived in the girl," she said, thoughtfully, "even if she were disposed to flirt with other men —even then there might be a stronger motive than ever for her wishing to get rid of Abbott. He may have become jealous and threatened her."

"It is, of course, possible," Ruff assented politely. "Your theory would at any rate account for your brother's present attitude."

She looked at him steadfastly. "You believe then," she said, "that my brother shot Austen Abbott?"

"I do," he admitted frankly. "So does every man or woman of common sense in London. On the facts as they are stated in the newspapers, with the addition of which I have told you, no other conclusion is possible."

Lady Mary rose. "Then I may as well go," she said tearfully.

"Not at all," Peter Ruff declared. "This is a matter of business with me. I say that on the facts as they are known your brother's guilt appears indisputable. I do not say that there may not be other facts in the background which might alter the state of affairs. If you wish me to search for them, engage me and I will do my best."

"Isn't that what I am here for?" Lady Mary exclaimed.

"Very well," Peter Ruff said. "My services are at your disposal."

"You will do your best, won't you?" she begged. "Remember that he is my brother—my favorite brother!"

"I will do what can be done," Peter Ruff promised. "Please sit down at that desk and write me two letters of introduction."

She drew off her gloves and prepared to obey him. "To whom?" she asked.

"To the solicitors who are defending your brother," he said, "and to Miss Letty Shaw."

"You mean to go and see her?" Lady Mary asked, doubtfully.

"Naturally," Peter Ruff answered. "If your supposition is correct she might easily give herself away under a little subtle cross-examination. It is my business to know how to ask people questions in such a way that if they do not speak the truth their words give some indication of it. If she is innocent I shall know that I have to make my effort in another direction."

"What other direction can

there be?" Lady Mary asked dismally. Peter Ruff said nothing. He was far too kind-hearted to kindle false hopes.

"It's a hopeless case, of course," Miss Brown remarked after Lady Mary had departed.

"I'm afraid so," Peter Ruff answered. "Still I must earn my money. Please get someone to take you to supper tonight at the Milan and see if you can pick up any scandal."

"About Letty?" she asked.

"About either of them," he answered. "Particularly, I should like to know if any explanation has cropped up of her supping alone with Austen Abbott."

"I don't see why you can't take me yourself," she remarked. "You are on the side of the law this time at any rate."

"I will," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "I will call for you at eleven o'clock tonight."

He rose and closed his desk emphatically.

"You are going out," she asked.

"I am going to see Miss Letty Shaw," he answered.

He took a taxicab to the flats and found a handful of curious people still gazing up at the third floor. The maid who answered his summons was absolutely certain that Miss Shaw would not see him. He persuaded her after some difficulty to take in his letter while he waited in the hall. When she returned she showed him into a small sitting room and pulled down the blinds.

"Miss Shaw will see you, sir, for a few minutes," she announced in a subdued tone. "Poor dear young lady," she continued, "she has been crying her eyes out all the morning."

"No wonder," Peter Ruff said sympathetically. "It's a terrible business, this!"

"One of the nicest young men as ever walked," the girl declared firmly. "As for that brute he deserved all he's got and more!"

Peter Ruff was left alone for nearly a quarter of an hour. Then the door was softly opened and Letty Shaw entered. There was no doubt whatever about her suffering. Ruff, who had seen her only lately at the theater, was shocked. Under her eyes were blacker lines than her make-up pencil had ever traced. Not only was she ghastly pale but her face seemed wan and shrunken. She spoke to him the moment she entered, leaning with one hand upon the sideboard.

"Lady Mary writes that you want to help us," she said. "Do you really think you can?"

Even her voice had gone. She spoke hoarsely, as if short of breath. Her eyes searched his face feverishly. He remained silent and it seemed to her that his eyes were like points of fire upon her face.

"What is the matter?" she asked, her voice breaking. "What have you come for?"

"Madam," Peter Ruff said, "I should like to help you and I will do what I can. But it will be necessary for you to answer two questions truthfully!"

Her eyes grew wider. It was the face of a terrified child. "Why not?" she exclaimed. "What have I to conceal?"

"Remember then," he said smoothly, "that you and I are alone without witnesses or eavesdroppers. Was it Brian Sotherst who shot Abbott—or was it you?"

She gave a little cry. Her hands clasped the sides of her head in horror. *"I?"* she exclaimed. "Oh, my God—"

He waited. In a moment she looked up. "You cannot believe that," she said with a calmness for which he was scarcely prepared. "It is absurd. I left the room by the inner door as he took up his hat to step out into the hall."

"Incidentally—" Peter asked, "and this is not my other question, mind—why did you not let him out yourself?"

"We had disagreed," she answered curtly.

Peter Ruff bent his head in assent. "I see," he remarked. "You had disagreed. Abbott probably hoped that you would relent, so he waited for a few minutes. Brian Sotherst, who imagined had escaped from his engagement in time to come and wish you good night, must have walked in and found him there. Tell me how would Captain Sotherst get in?"

"He had a key," the girl answered. "My mother lives here with me and we have only one maid. It was more convenient. I gave him one washed in gold for a birthday present only a few days ago."

"Thank you," Peter Ruff said. "The revolver, I understand, was your property?"

She nodded. "It was a present from Brian," she said. "He gave it to me as a joke and I had it on the table with some other curiosities."

"The first question," Peter Ruff said, "is disposed of. May I proceed to the second?"

The girl moistened her lips. "Yes," she answered.

"Why did you have dinner with Austen Abbott last night?"

She shrank a little away. "Why do you ask that? Surely merely having dinner with—"

"You have been on the stage, my dear Miss Shaw," Peter Ruff interrupted, "for between four and five years. During the whole of that time it has been your very wise habit to join dinner parties when the company was agreeable to you, but never to dine with anyone constantly in the gossip columns in an unfavorable light. Am I not right?"

"You seem to know a great deal about me," she said.

"You break your rule for the first time," Peter said, "in favor of a man of notoriously bad character, a few weeks after the announcement of your engagement to Captain Sotherst. You know very well the construction likely to be put upon your behavior. You, of all people, would be the most likely to appreciate the risk you ran. Why did you run it?"

All this time Letty had been standing. She came a little forward now and threw herself into an easy-chair. "It doesn't help!" she said. "All this doesn't help!"

"Nor can I help you then," Peter Ruff said, stretching out his hand for his hat.

She waved to him to put it down. "I will tell you," she said. "It has nothing to do with the case but since you ask I'll tell you. There is a girl in our company—Fluffy Dean we all call her—only eighteen years old. She is very pretty, she has no money and she is such an affectionate little thing that although she is not at all wild in the usual modern sense, we are all terrified for her sake whenever she makes acquaintances.

"Several of us who are most interested made a sort of agreement. We all took turns looking after her and tried to see she did not meet anyone she shouldn't. Yet for all our precautions Austen Abbott got hold of her and turned her silly little head. He was a man of experience and she was only a child. She wouldn't listen to us—she wouldn't hear a word against him.

"I took what seemed to me to be the only chance. I went to him myself. I pleaded with him to leave her alone. I swore that if anything happened to her I would start a crusade against him, and would see that he should be shunned by every decent man and woman on the stage! He listened to what I had to say and at first he only smiled.

"When I had finished he made me an offer. He said that if I would dine with him alone at the Milan and permit him to escort me home afterwards he would disillusion Miss Dean, and make her realize what a little fool she had been. One further condition he made—that I was to tell no one why I did it. It was the man's brutal vanity! I made the promise but I'm breaking it now.

"I went through with the supper although I hated it. I let him come in for a drink as though he had been a friend. Then he tried to make love to me. I took the opportunity of telling him exactly what I thought of him. Then I showed him the door and left. Afterwards—afterwards Brian came

in! They must have met upon the very threshold!"

Peter Ruff took up his hat. "Thank you!" he said.

"You see," she said despairfully, "that it all has very little to do with the case. I meant to keep it to myself because of course, apart from anything else, apart from Brian's meeting him coming out of my rooms, it supplies an additional justification for anger on Brian's part."

"I see," he answered. "I am much obliged to you, Miss Shaw. Believe me you have my sincere sympathy."

Peter Ruff's farewell words were unheard. Letty had fallen forward in her chair, her head buried in her hands.

Peter Ruff went to Berkeley Square and found Lady Mary waiting for him. Sir William Trencham, the famous solicitor, was with her. Lady Mary introduced the two men. All the time she was anxiously watching Ruff's face.

"Mr. Ruff has been to see Miss Shaw," she said to Sir William. "Mr. Ruff, tell me quickly," she continued, with her hand upon his shoulder, "did she say anything? Did you find anything out?"

He shook his head. "No!" he said. "I found out nothing!"

"You don't think then," Lady Mary cried, "that there is any chance of getting her to confess that she did it herself?"

"Why should she have done it herself?" Peter Ruff asked. "She admits that the man tried to make love to her. She simply left him. She was in her own house with her mother and servant within call. There was no struggle in the room—we know that. There was no necessity for any."

"Have you made any other inquiries?" Lady Mary asked.

"The few I *have* made," Peter Ruff answered gravely, "point all in the same direction. I ascertained at the Milan that your brother called there late last night and that he heard Miss Shaw had been dining with Austen Abbott. He followed them home. I have ascertained too that he had a key to Miss Shaw's flat. He apparently met Austen Abbott upon the threshold."

Lady Mary covered her face with her hands. She seemed to read in Ruff's words the verdict of the two men—the verdict of common sense. Nevertheless Peter made one more request before leaving.

"I should like to see Captain Sotherst if you can get me an order," he said to Sir William.

"You can go with me tomorrow morning," the lawyer answered. "The proceedings this morning, of course, were simply formal. Until after the inquest it will be easy to arrange an interview."

Lady Mary looked up quickly. "There is still something in your mind then?" she asked. "You think that there is a bare chance?"

"There is always the hundredth chance." Peter Ruff replied.

Peter Ruff and Miss Brown dined at the Milan that night as they had arranged but it was not a cheerful evening. Brian Sotherst had been very popular among Letty Shaw's little circle of friends and the general feeling was one of consternation at the tragedy which had befallen him.

Austen Abbott too was known to all of them and although a good many of the men—and even the women—were outspoken enough to declare at once that it served him right, nevertheless the shock of death—death without a second's warning—had a paralyzing effect even upon those who were his severest critics.

Violet Brown spoke to a few of her friends—introduced Peter Ruff here and there—but nothing was said which could throw in any way even the glimmerings of a new light upon the tragedy. It all seemed too hopelessly obvious.

About twenty minutes before closing time the habitués of the place were provided with something in the nature of a sensation. A little party entered which seemed altogether free from the general air of gloom. Foremost among them was a very young and exceedingly pretty girl with light golden hair waved in front of her forehead, deep blue eyes and the slight airy figure of a child. She was accompanied by another young woman, whose appearance was a little too obvious to be prepossessing, and three or four young men—dark, clean-shaven, and dressed with the irritating exactness of their class—young stockbrokers or men about town.

Miss Brown's eyes grew very wide open. "What a little beast!" she cried.

"Who?" Peter Ruff asked.

"That pretty girl there," she answered "Fluffy Dean, her name is. She is Letty Shaw's protegé and Letty wouldn't have dreamed of allowing her to come out with a crowd like that. Tonight of all nights," she said indignantly, "when Letty is away!"

Peter Ruff was interested. "So that is Miss Fluffy Dean," he said, looking at her curiously. "She seems a little excited."

"She's a horrid little piece!" Miss Brown said. "I hope someone will tell Letty and that she will drop her now. A girl who would do such a thing as that when Letty is in such trouble isn't worth taking care of. Just listen to them all!"

They were certainly becoming a little boisterous. A magnum of

champagne was being opened. Fluffy Dean's cheeks were already flushed, and her eyes glittering. Everyone at the table was talking a great deal and drinking toasts.

"This is the end of Fluffy Dean," Violet Brown said, severely. "I hate to be uncharitable but it serves her right."

Peter Ruff paid his bill. "Let us go," he said.

In the taxicab on their way back to Miss Brown's rooms Ruff was unusually silent. But just before he said good night to her —on the pavement, in fact, outside her front door—he asked a question. "Violet," he said, "would you like to play detective for an hour or two?"

She looked at him in some surprise. "You know I always like to help in anything that's going," she said.

"Letty Shaw is an Australian, isn't she?" he asked.

"Yes."

"She was born there and lived there till she was nearly eighteen —is that true?" he asked again.

"Quite true."

"You know the offices of the P. & O. line of steamers in Pall Mall?" Peter asked.

She nodded.

"Well?"

"Get a sailing list to Australia —there should be a boat going Thursday. Present yourself as a prospective passenger. See how many unaccompanied young women there are going out and ask their names. Incidentally put in a little spare time watching the office."

She looked at him with parted lips and wide-open eyes. "Do you think . . ." she began.

He shook her hand warmly and stepped back into the taxicab. "Good night!" he said. "No questions, please. I won't expect you at the office at the usual time tomorrow. Telephone or run in if you've anything to tell me."

The taxicab disappeared round the corner of the street. Violet Brown was standing still upon the pavement with the latchkey in her hand.

It was the afternoon before the inquest on the body of Austen Abbott and there was gathered together in Letty Shaw's parlor a curiously assorted little group of people. There was Miss Shaw herself—or rather what seemed to be the ghost of herself—and her mother, Lady Mary and Sir William Trencham, Peter Ruff and Violet Brown— and Mr. John Dory.

The eyes of all of them were fixed upon Peter Ruff, who was the latest arrival. He stood in the middle of the room, calmly taking off his gloves and glancing complacently down at his well-creased trousers.

"Lady Mary," he said, "and Miss Shaw—I know that you are both anxious for me to explain why I ask you to meet me here

this afternoon and why I also requested my friend Mr. Dory from Scotland Yard, who has charge of the case against Captain Sotherst, to be present. I will tell you."

Mr. Dory nodded a little impatiently. "Unless you have something very definite to say," he said, "I think it would be as well to postpone any general discussion of this matter until after the inquest."

"I have something definite to say," Peter Ruff declared mildly.

Lady Mary's eyes flashed with hope. Letty Shaw leaned forward in her chair with white drawn face.

"Let it be understood," Peter Ruff said with a slight note of gravity creeping into his tone, "that I am here solely as the agent of Lady Mary Sotherst. I am paid and employed by her. My sole object is therefore on her behalf to discover proof of the innocence of Captain Sotherst. I take it, however," he added, turning towards the drooping figure in the easy-chair, "that Miss Shaw is an anxious to have the truth known."

"Of course, of course!" she murmured.

"In France," Peter Ruff said, "there is a somewhat curious custom which, despite a certain theatricality, has its points. The scene of the crime is visited and its events, so far as may be, reconstructed. Let us suppose for a moment that we are now engaged upon something of the sort."

Letty Shaw shrank back in her chair. Her thin white fingers were gripping its sides. Her eyes seemed to look upon terrible things. "It is too—awful!" she faltered.

"Madam," Peter Ruff said firmly, "we seek the truth. Be so good as to humor me in this. Dory, will you go to the front door, stand upon the mat—so? You are Captain Sotherst—you have just entered. I am Austen Abbott. You, Miss Shaw, have just ordered me from the room. You see, I move toward the door. I open it—so, Miss Shaw," he said turning swiftly towards her. "Once more will you assure me that everyone who was in the flat that night, with the exception of your domestic servant, is present now?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Good! Then who—" he asked, suddenly pointing to a door on the left, "who is in that room?"

They had all crowded after him to the threshold—thronging around him as he stood face to face with John Dory. His finger never wavered. It was pointing steadily towards a closed door a few feet to the left.

Suddenly Letty Shaw rushed past them with a loud shriek. "You shall not go in!" she cried. "What business is it of his?"

She stood with her back to the door, her arms outstretched like a cross. Her cheeks were livid. Her eyes seemed starting from her head.

Peter Ruff and John Dory laid their hands upon the girl's wrists. She clung to her place frantically. She was dragged from it, screaming. Peter Ruff entered first. Almost immediately he turned round and his face was very grave.

"Something has happened in here, I am afraid," he said. "Please come in quietly."

On the bed lay Fluffy Dean, fully dressed—motionless. One hand hung down toward the floor. From her lifeless fingers a little phial had slipped. The room was full of trunks addressed to—

Miss Smith
Passenger to Melborne.
S. S. Caroline

Peter Ruff moved over toward the bed and took up a piece of paper, upon which were scribbled a few lines in pencil.

"I think," he said, "that I must read these aloud. You all have a right to hear them."

No one spoke. He continued: "Forgive me, Letty, but I cannot go to Australia. They would only bring me back. When I remember that awful moment I no longer want to go on living. I feel that I am going mad! Some day I should do this—better now. Give my love to the girls. *Fluffy.*"

They sent for a doctor and John Dory rang up Scotland Yard. Letty Shaw had fainted and had been carried to her room. While they waited about in strange half-numbed excitement Peter Ruff once more spoke to them.

"The reconstruction is easy enough now," he said. "The partition between this sitting room and that little bedroom is only an artificial one—something almost as flimsy as a screen. You see," he continued, tapping with his knuckles, "you can almost put your hand through it. If you look a little lower down you will see where an opening has been made.

"Fluffy Dean was being taken care of by Miss Shaw—even staying with her here. Miss Dean hears her lover's voice in this room—hears him pleading with Miss Shaw on the night of the murder. She has been sent home early from the theater and it is just possible that she saw or had been told that Austen Abbott had fetched Miss Shaw after the performance and had taken her to supper.

"She was mad with anger and jealousy. The revolver was there upon the table with a silver box of cartridges. She picked it up and waited in her room. What she heard proved, at least to her,

her lover's infidelity. She stood there at her door, waiting. When Austen Abbott comes out, she shoots, throws the revolver at him, closes her door, and goes off into a faint.

"Perhaps she hears footsteps —a key in the door. At any rate, Captain Sotherst arrives a few minutes later. He finds, half in the hall, half on the threshold of the sitting room, Austen Abbott dead and Miss Shaw's revolver by his side. If he had been a wise young man he would have aroused the household. Why he did not do so we can perhaps guess. He put two and two together a little too quickly.

"It is certain that he believed the dead man had been shot by his fiancée. His first thought was to get rid of the revolver. At any rate he walked down to the street with it in his hand and was promptly arrested by the policeman who had heard the shot. Naturally he refused to plead, because he believed that Miss Shaw had killed the man, probably in self-defense.

"She, at first, believed her lover guilty and when afterwards Fluffy Dean confessed she, with feminine lack of common sense, was trying to get the girl out of the country before telling the truth. A visit of hers to the office of the steamship company gave me the clue I required.

Lady Mary grasped both his hands. "And Scotland Yard," she exclaimed, with a withering glance at Dory, "have done their best to hang my brother!"

Peter Ruff raised his eyebrows. "Dear Lady Mary," he said, "remember that it is the business of Scotland Yard to find a man guilty. It is mine, when I am employed for that purpose, to find him innocent. You must not be too hard upon my friend Mr. Dory. He and I seem to come up against each other a little too often as it is."

"A little too often," John Dory repeated softly. "But one cannot tell. Don't believe, Lady Mary," he added, "that we ever want to kill an innocent man."

"It is your profession, though," she answered, "to find criminals —and his," she added, touching Peter Ruff on the shoulder, "to look for the truth."

Peter Ruff bowed low—the compliment pleased him.

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never a stool pigeon

by . . . Edwin Baird

Benny feared the Law. But with a horse like Singalong flaunting forty to one odds a man had to gamble—or lose his self-respect.

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Benny, as the police of the Windy City know to their sorrow, is a race track tout with a system. With persuasive eloquence he touts each horse in a race to a separate customer, then collects from the winner. A very simple system, as you can see, and distinctly sure-fire for Benny.

"You seem high tonight, Benny," said Joe de Vilbiss, proprietor of the Red Front Tavern.

"I got a right to feel high," said Benny. "Boy, did I clean up on that last race today!"

"Tell us about it," said Mike Gallo, the pool shark.

"It's like this," said Benny, modestly downing his drink. "The last race is just coming up, and I'm flat, see? It's a six-furlong race and there's eight horses entered. I get seven clients for seven of the nags, but I can't find none who'll take the eighth. I try every sucker I see, but no dice. You know how it is sometimes. When everybody shies away from a glue-factory baby

If we had at our disposal the wealth of the Indies we'd be seriously tempted to offer a handsome cash premium for very short yarns as ingeniously amusing as this little foray into crime-skirting knavery by Edwin Baird, say up to ninety golden doubloons. But having been a mystery book editor himself for a good many years, and a very celebrated one at that, Mr. Baird, well, we're convinced, accept the wish as the tribute it's intended to be.

I getta hunch he's gonna cop."

He stared around the tavern.

"What's the name of this horse?" Jake Cronk, the handbook runner, asked.

"Singalong," Benny said, "and he's thirty to one in the opening odds. So they're comin' from the paddock and there I am with my hunch gettin' stronger every minute and me without a dime. I'd collected on the first five races, but I played a bum hunch in the sixth and lost every meg. Well, they're paradin' onto the track now and the odds has gone to forty, and then I sees Hutburn and McInerney."

Hutburn and McInerney! A perceptible change came over Benny's audience.

"You didn't tackle *them!*"

"It's my last chance," Benny said. "I know what you are thinking—me puttin' the bee on a coupla bulls—but, like I say, it's my last chance. The ponies is paradin' to the post and the odds on Singalong is forty-five in the final. So I braces these cops and says to 'em, 'Are you guys still lookin' for that frill, Evie Murray, on account the beef is hot against Gilhooley's mob?'

" 'Yeah,' says Hutburn. 'What about it?'

" 'For a finniff,' I says, 'I'll tell you where I seen her.'

"They put their heads together, and then McInerney hands me a five-case note and says, 'Okay. Where'd you see her?'

"So I gives 'em an address and dashes back to the five-straight window just in time to sock the fin on Singalong. I guess you know the rest. Singalong wins and pays ninety-two smackers. And me with five fish in his snoot. Two hundred and thirty I collect. And that," said Benny Brody, "is why I'm on this bender."

There was no response from Benny's listeners. Only a frozen silence.

Benny looked at them and said, "What's eatin' you guys?"

Joe de Vilbiss cleared his throat. "I never expected to see the day, Benny, when *you'd* turn stool."

Benny snorted. "So that's it! You oughta know me better. Let me tell you what I done to them cops—"

He stopped, his glass midway to his lips. He was staring at the backbar mirror. What he saw was the reflection of two men entering the tavern.

They were Detectives Hutburn and McInerney.

Benny, still staring, watched them approach. They leaned against the bar on either side of him.

" 'Lo, Benny," said Hutburn pleasantly.

"Hi, Otto," said Benny, and lifted the glass to his lips.

"We been tailin' you all over

town," said McInerney. "And here we are."

"Well, that's nice," said Benny, setting his glass down. "You're just in time for a drink."

"I guess you know," said Hutburn, "why we've been tailin' you."

"Why, no," said Benny. "Why?"

"We wanted to ask you about this," said McInerney, and dropped a slip of paper on the bar.

Benny looked at the paper on which was written a street address. "Yeah?" he asked. "What about it?"

"You recognize that address?"

"Sure," said Benny. "I gave it to you."

"And you told us," said Hutburn, "that we'd find one Eva Murray there, wanted by the police in connection with a ten grand con game pulled by Kid Gilhooley and his mob."

"What I *actually* told you," said Benny, choosing his words with care, "was that I *seen* Evie Murray at that address."

"Well, that address turns out to be a vacant lot."

"And you damn well knew it was a vacant lot when you give it to us," added McInerney.

He glared at Benny.

"Now, now, boys," said Benny. "Let's not get excited about this. Did I tell you it *wasn't* a vacant lot?"

"Are you tryin' to rib us?" demanded Hutburn, a sharp edge to his voice.

"Why, of course not," said Benny, surprised. "Why would I try to rib you? I told you I seen Evie at that address, and I did. She was standin' right there on the sidewalk, and for all I know, she's still standin' there. I can't see that it matters none whether it's a vacant lot, or a forty-nine-story hotel, or a chop suey joint—"

"Wise guy, ha? Think you're cute, ha? Well, you can't get away with it," said Hutburn, his color rising. "Not with us you can't. We gave you five bucks—"

"Now, now," soothed Benny.

"Give me back my five bucks," roared McInerney, "before I bust you one!"

"With pleasure," said Benny, and lugs out a roll and peels off a fin. "Now if you boys will join me in a drink . . ."

The coppers marched to the door. It slammed behind them.

Instantly a babble broke around Benny. The proprietor, Joe de Vilbiss, voiced its sentiments eloquently. "We owe you an apology, Benny," he said. "We should have known *you'd* never stool. You're a square guy, Benny, if ever there was one."

"Thanks," said Benny, and quickly downed his drink. Then he wiped his mouth and said, more to himself than to any of us, "But I doubt if there ever was one."

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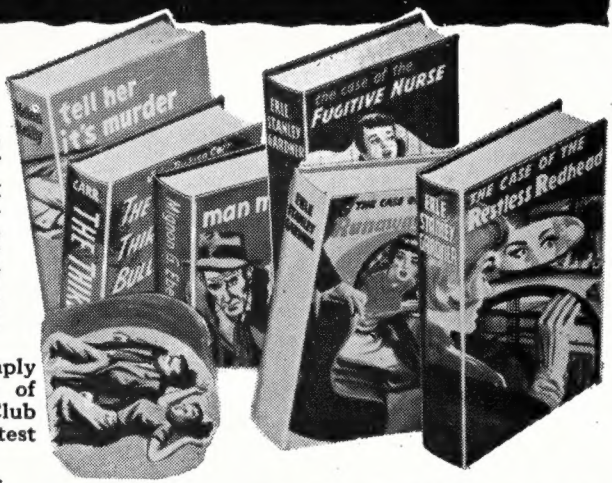

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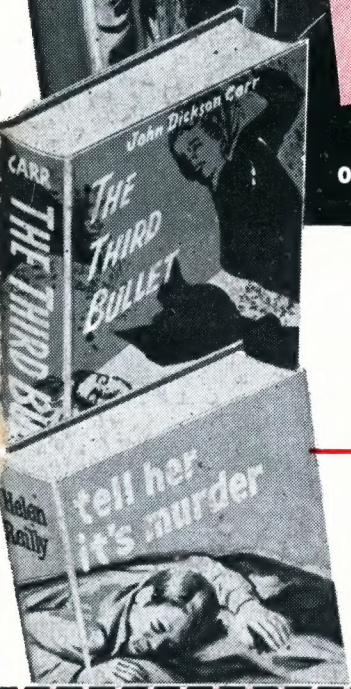

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4 MAN MISSING

By Mignon G. Eberhart

Sarah Kent noticed odd things at the hospital: A smell of ether in the *wrong place.* A door closing by itself. And then the still figure on the bed. The chief suspect, *A MAN DEAD FOR 3 YEARS!*

5 THE THIRD BULLET

By John Dickson Carr

Vicky Adams disappeared from a cottage *even though all the doors and windows were still locked from the inside!* She isn't found—ALIVE!

6 TELL HER IT'S MURDER

By Helen Reilly

Your name is Jim Andrus. You attend a party, have too much to drink. You "black out." Next morning you're accused of MURDER!

—SEE OTHER SIDE

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